

IDENTIFYING YOUTH WHO HAVE BEEN MISHANDLED
IN A POSTPANDEMIC ERA AT FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH OF HILLSIDE

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
1. MINISTRY FOCUS	6
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	27
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS	49
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	68
5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS.....	89
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS	114
A. PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY	140
B. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.....	142
C. JOURNAL PROMPTS	145
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	147

ABSTRACT

YOUTH WHO HAVE BEEN MISHANDLED

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My project context is located at First Baptist Church of Hillside, Hillside, New Jersey. The problem within this context is the apparent proliferation of youth who have experienced being mishandled both emotionally and physically in their homes and respective communities. The project duration is eight weeks. The data collection methods will include pre-project and post-project questionnaires, focus group discussions, and journaling assignments. I envision a small leadership group within the church learning how to form a youth leadership council which will be equipped to support youth who have experienced being mishandled in ways common to their local context.

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DEDICATION

First, I give honor to God without whom none would be possible. I dedicate this work to my mother, Deborah Foster who resides in heaven. Although you are not here, I am grateful that I had you to teach me kindness and encourage me in my business and my faith journey. To my father, Ronald Foster, for setting an example of what it means to care for others and to protect those you love by moving with wisdom. To my siblings, Lonale, Rachel, Jessica, Thomas, Rosa and Ant for being the support system for me in moments when I wanted to quit. All of you have encouraged me to keep going. To my nieces and nephews, I hope you remember that with God all things are possible. To my family, Fosters, Motley, and Williams, I want to thank you all for your support. To my First Baptist Church of Hillside family who shared encouraging words and affection. To my pastor Rev. Dr. Christopher Michael Jones and my First Lady Nikki Jones, you demonstrate servant leadership with love and I thank God for you I love you all to LIFE.

INTRODUCTION

When youth experience trauma, it can impact their self-esteem and worth as well as how they act. If one has been traumatized by physical, emotional, or verbal abuse, the toxicity of that environment is not conducive to discovering who they are in Christ. They are likely struggle to accept they have value or purpose, resulting in a lack of change. However, if the church could identify those who have experienced trauma, the church could ensure its teaching would help those who have little to no self-esteem, encouraging them and supporting them as they discover their true identities on their journeys to healing.

Biblical Foundations

When Mephibosheth was mishandled by his carer, he had to deal with the consequences of what someone else's actions did. He suffered permanent physical damage and walked with a limp. Those who have been injured by others who were supposed to care for them can also be victims of abuse. Youths experience injuries at the hands of other people and in some cases, those others learned the abuse as a form of care or discipline. This impacts how the parent raises the child, which can continue through generations.

Those who lose their inheritances may recover them. Even though they may not recover everything, they can recover their sense of dignity and identity. David ordered

Mephibosheth's return to the court and return to his grandfather's palace. When we have been mishandled, we will not act according to our birthright as children of God. What we can teach the youth who have lost their identity in Christ who they are according to the word. In the interim, we can identify those who have had their identity or worth stripped. David restored Mephibosheth to the throne he would have inherited if his father had not been severed from his inheritance.

Although the church cannot financially shoulder the fiscal responsibility for youth, it can learn how to identify the Mephibosheths in its congregations. The church can set up referrals to provide suggestions for counselors or services available to help those seeking treatment or healing for their ailments. In the aftermath of the pandemic, there was a rise in cases of domestic violence. The church dispersed, and people could not leave their homes regardless of their domestic situations.

Historical

In the 1920s, there was another pandemic that impacted the world. Medics were not familiar with the disease, and it was spreading rapidly. The H1N1 influenza virus is also known by the misnomer "Spanish flu." The world was put under quarantine to reduce the spreading of the disease, and people were mandated to wear masks. During this period, many people experienced isolation, and frustrations arose. People were gathered around the radio to hear the news and had become accustomed to being separate.

Schools and churches were closed. People had to adapt to staying in their homes. With so much uncertainty, some people were fearful; over time, they became weary and

anxious and made poor decisions due to their frustrations. The pandemic caused a stark disruption to daily routines. Children were limited to staying in their backyards. Essential workers such as nurses and doctors were the only ones who left their homes.

As the church is being rebuilt, it must rebuild its core congregation and relationship with the community. We must have a strong community to love and support those who have been mishandled. Despite Mephibosheth's separation from his home and family, he returned to the palace after living in other conditions. As the church regathers and rebuilds, teaching must concentrate on the well-being of the people in the church and the well-being of the community in which it is located. For example, the Red Bird Mission helped to build church edifices, provided meals, cared for the sick, and taught Sunday Schools.¹

Theological

Ecclesiology in the post-pandemic era reminds us to regather to the church as a community to support those who have been mishandled. After all the virtual meetings and matriculating through school via virtual calls, people miss gathering in person with one another. Often, people who have been mishandled have experienced manipulation, gaslighting, or other forms of abuse. This abuse impacts self-worth and self-esteem. People need to be reminded that they are as important as anyone else and their voice matters.

¹ Roberta Schaeffer, *The Story of Red Bird Mission: A History of Missions in Appalachia*, United Methodist Church. (Red Bird Mission, Inc. of United Methodist Church, 1980), p 7-9

The church reminds people of their place in the kingdom. No one is elevated above others, and everyone works interdependently. If everyone does their part, the church operates at its best capacity (1 Corinthians 12). If someone fails to complete their part, the church does not thrive. The Baptist church believes in the priesthood of all believers. According to 1 Peter 2:9, we are a royal priesthood, and people must be affirmed to know they have value. The church has the unique opportunity to encourage people within their discipleship in the Christian faith.

When people give their lives to God, they will discover who God created them to be. They will understand their value and learn that they do not deserve to be abused and the love of God does not cause harm (1 Corinthians 13:4-13). People need support as they transform, hopefully with the support of licensed counselors. The church is a community of believers called by the Holy Spirit to a change of life in Christ to demonstrate loving, compassionate living.²

Interdisciplinary

Learning psychology will help us to identify those who may need more help healing. Injuries from being mishandled, especially from abuse, need more than just attending church, bible study, and prayer to heal. As leaders develop discernment, they can be educated on the indicators to identify those who have been mishandled and this information can help others to heal holistically. Spiritual issues can be handled in the

² Oliver Davies, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2013), 142.

church; however, emotional and verbal injuries can be handled in therapy and, in some cases, with medication. The counselor can further determine if a psychiatrist is needed.

Understanding the psychological impacts of trauma or abuse will assist in our perspectives as individuals as well as obligate us to be more patient with people. Many people do not realize they need help because the traumatic events may have happened when they were younger. Our job is to inform them of what we know and to show them support and love as they receive the assistance they need to be well. We can hold them accountable as we encourage them to seek help.

Ultimately, individuals have to acknowledge and accept that help is needed and then want to receive treatment or to begin a journey to heal. If people are in denial, they will reject any offers of help. In addition, they must not associate therapy with the negative stereotype of only being for those who are “crazy” because when recommended, they may become offended. If leaders know what signs to look for, they can walk with the people and encourage them spiritually as they develop with psychological and emotional help.

Mishandled youth need to be surrounded by a community to support them. The church should remind them of who they are in Christ. As children of God, they are a royal priesthood, have value, and matter. A council of leaders identifying those who are mishandled will help us to learn who may require additional help and may need to be referred to professionals. We can support those who have experienced trauma while they are getting the treatment they need from licensed professionals.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The goal is to create a safe nurturing space in which young Christians learn how to express their faith boldly while also living a Christian life as their authentic selves. If we meet the youth where they are and create environments conducive to learning, fellowship, and community service, the Holy Spirit will work on their hearts transforming them holistically into true disciples of Christ. This will take partnership with their parents as well as a leadership team or council to reinforce the importance of Christian practices' not being compartmentalized just to the time among the church but adopting the lifestyle. If parents fail to see the importance of integrating Christian practices in the home, the children will learn to compartmentalize Christianity solely to entering the edifice or when gathering among the body of believers. Without consistent attendance and personal study, other things can take precedence over the Christian lifestyle.

Creating an environment for the youth to be comfortable enough to be open to sharing the struggles they face, will help teens see they are not alone in their journey. Some may need to live contrary to what they were exposed to prior to their adolescence, and some may need to adopt some good habits to maintain appropriate habits not what is popular. They need a haven where they feel safe to be who they really are not whom society tells them they should be. They need to discover who God created them to be. In this world heavily influenced by social media, where validation is measured by likes,

follows and shares, we cannot ignore the influence it has on our youth. As each context is different, the needs for the subject matter will vary. However, for the ministry to have its intended impact, we need to begin with bringing our ideas to the parents as a suggested framework and encourage them to bring ideas to the table as well.

Fellowship among the youth and the parents must become a standard. Parents must periodically engage with the youth leader or pastor. Without their participation or engagement, one will lack the support one needs. The desires parents have for their children must be voiced and addressed. Any feedback from them would be helpful. What are their concerns? Are there strains in their relationship with their child? How can youth ministry assist them in the discipleship of their child? What will make the parent meetings more interesting? How can the parent meetings become something to look forward to? Meetings will need to include sustenance to reduce the formality of the environment so we can meet parents and youth where they are.

Work of the ministry can be done with one person but with a supportive team, the minister or leader can avoid burn out. Ministry should not be done alone. If ministry is done alone, youth are limited to how much can get done by that individual. A leadership team or youth council must also be created or in place to execute the activities and gatherings for the youth.

Context

The Victorious in Believing Eternity (VIBE) Ministry is a ministry at the First Baptist Church of Hillside in Hillside, NJ. VIBE youth are ages 12-18. The First Baptist

Church of Hillside was established as a children's ministry on June 24, 1919. On April 12, 1924, the Elizabeth Avenue Baptist Church built the Hillside Gospel Church, with Rev. Harold A. Eaton serving as the first pastor. On September 25, 1929, Hillside Gospel Church made the congregational decision to change its name to the First Baptist Church of Hillside.¹ They are from a variety of socio-ethnic backgrounds such as African American, Caribbean, Latinx, and South America. A majority of the youth reside in the township of Hillside, but some reside in the cities of Newark, Union, Elizabeth, Woodbridge, Bayonne, and the North Brunswick area. The ethnic shift from a congregation of European American descent to a congregation of people of color alters the perspective especially when you have a lineage of pastors who were Euro-American until 1984. The focus was different because the perspective was different. First Baptist Church of Hillside intentionally connects to and serves our local community.

Understanding the different nationalities and socio-economic statuses helps decipher what activities I need to manage in ministry. With some who can afford to go on an outing and others who cannot, we can inquire if people would be willing to cover those who are financially stretched. Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and then people were motivated to share their belongings², we may have to be prepared to approach the ministry in the same manner. The Holy Spirit is still in the church and the book of Acts is still open. When there is a need, the congregation can fulfill it.

Our church is special regarding the membership of the church which includes people who are believers but were searching for a church home or were newly converted

¹ "Our History," First Church of Hillside New Jersey, April 15, 2019, <https://fbc-hillside.org/our-history/>.

² Acts 2:44-46, New Revised Standard Version. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

to the faith. While this is something worthy of celebration, it also presents a challenge. Some of our youth regularly attend weekly worship services online but the majority do not. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, membership continued to increase. The leadership is not able to keep up with the membership as often as they desire. People new to our church bring a new dynamic to the church³. At a leadership gathering, our Senior Pastor Dr. Jones brought a mannequin and several clothing options. He tasked the leadership with dressing the mannequin in a way that best represents the congregation. When the leadership was done with the exercise, they realized how much the congregation had changed with the new membership. We reevaluated the activities we sponsor, and the type of gatherings needed. Now, we have adopted a hybrid model for Sunday morning worship. Some people remain connected to the church but no longer enter the edifice compounding the problem of attendance. We have those who are actively engaged and those who watch silently without liking or commenting on the thread.

This challenge requires the leadership to take the extra step for the youth who no longer set foot in the edifice or who have never entered the edifice. We must discover who they are and prepare methods to connect with them. Creating opportunities to fellowship on a virtual platform as well as in person is needed. Some of the youths have been in the church for years. They were babies or toddlers when their parents started bringing them to church. Very few of the youth are new to the church but they hunger to learn more about God. We must be creative in using the platform. Many are not interested in remaining virtual, however; it must remain an option for gathering because of the new digital disciples. However, we do need to be cautious to safeguard the space of

³ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, and Carl S. Dudley et al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 84-89.

the youth. This may require cameras to remain on during our virtual meetings so we can confirm the people present.

Youth who attend are mostly children of parents who were not raised in the church. God entrusted the First Baptist Church of Hillside to disciple people of all ages who are new to the faith; and, while the increase in numbers is a blessing, it presents a challenge. The younger generations, (i.e. Millennials and Generation Z) are often the children of people who experienced church hurt and left the church. Because attending church weekly was not instilled in them as children, it is easy for youths to revert to old habits of not attending. Often, one finds millennials do not have a religious affiliation. Many millennials consider themselves spiritual.⁴ They believe in God and pray to God. Some believe Jesus Christ is divine, but others do not. They rarely read the Bible, and their parents do not regularly attend church with their children. Consequently, most of these younger members find little support for their church activities at home and little reinforcement of churchgoing.

Given this lack of parental reinforcement or modeling, partnering with the parents to hear their ideas and feedback could benefit their children holistically as they seek a richer Christian life. Bringing some practical ideas to the table will be necessary as well. The overall message requiring reinforcement is that Christianity is not a part of one's life, but a lifestyle. It cannot be put on and taken off. Yet this change of perspective can only happen gradually, nurtured through intentional Bible study, prayer, and daily surrender to the Holy Spirit. The surrounding culture loses precedence over God as congregants

⁴ Caroline Newman, "Why Millennials Are Leaving Religion but Embracing Spirituality," *UVA Today*, May 10, 2018, <https://news.virginia.edu/content/qa-why-millennials-are-leaving-religion-embracing-spirituality>.

discover who they are in God. This is no easy battle. Mainstream American culture promotes instant gratification and encourages the pursuit of prestige. It impels people to ask what their hearts tell them instead of seeking what God has set before them. As a result, parents prioritize education and even sports activities, but not Sunday school, which must be equally important as an educational pursuit.

Most of the youth in the group do not attend Sunday school. Sunday school is held every week, but only three out of eighteen children attend regularly. Again, this lack of participation in Sunday school and Bible study is due in part to a lack of reinforcement from parents. Because they are not accustomed to attending, we need to explore why they are not joining Sunday school. Most of the parents do not regularly reinforce Christian practice or teach basic practices of discipleship by example. While some parents livestream Sunday mornings and a handful bring their children to church, most do nothing. Given all this, a critical challenge is finding time within the youths' schedules to meet. They often practice sports throughout the week and compete on Saturdays or Friday nights. Although we do have a regular attendance of digital disciples, it is not always possible to measure if the children are present. Some parents are on their Facebook accounts, and we will not know if the children are present when they are watching unless the parents explicitly declare they are attending every week.

Currently, youth ministry activities are being prepared to promote three areas: fellowship with one another, teaching the Word of God, and community service. These areas need continual redevelopment and effective execution. Today's youth are inundated with images on social media, mostly TikTok and YouTube. They rarely watch television, but they are often on social media or gaming consoles, communicating with one another

while playing video games or listening to music via streaming services like Apple Music or Spotify. Some use profanity, do provocative poses, or wear provocative clothing on social media, seeking shares, likes, and followers. Indeed, some seem to live almost entirely in the digital world. As avid gamers, they spend more time building their profiles and playing online than they spend time in the presence of one another. Aside from attending school, some youths rarely leave their houses.

Everyone is at a different place in their understanding of God, the Bible, and what Jesus Christ did when He was here on the earth. An assessment of the knowledge level of each youth, obtained using Biblical games like Bible Mad Gab, revealed some have relatively little biblical knowledge of God. Biblical knowledge was not essential to completing the game, but it certainly helped. Youth ministry is designed for teenagers to engage with the Bible to understand its relevance and applicability.

Although the Bible is paramount in every Christian ministry, it is beneficial to know other common topics among the youth. The most popular topic among the youth in my context is anime (Japanese animation). Many of them love shows from that genre. They are also occupied with a variety of sports: football, basketball, soccer, and track and field. Outside of school, sports dominate their time in the form of training schedules and events held on Saturdays and Friday nights.

The church is designed to be an inclusive community that comes together. Our ministry dynamic has shifted from catering to the membership to allow people to feel like they belong first. We must examine the rituals⁵ that have been the most successful in gathering the congregation prior to the onset of the pandemic. For example, we had a

⁵ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, and Carl S. Dudley et al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 84-89.

large turnout at our annual church picnic, our church Christmas party and when we had events like Senior Appreciation Sunday or the Men's Cook-Off. One thing was common around each event: food. In the predominantly African American church, our largest gatherings were around the table.⁶ This incentive can be achieved in a variety of ways: we can have a meal catered, organize a potluck meal or go to a restaurant.

Food included in the meetings, even if it is light refreshments, will be one of the incentives to come. Creating a less formal environment where the interaction is dialectical rather than top-down will be helpful. Using these suggestions will help in providing victuals to the meeting groups. We can ask for monetary donations and either purchase the food or go to a restaurant. We want to keep costs low because there are some who are able to afford it but some who cannot. We want to remain welcoming to everyone regardless of whether they are able to pay. In dealing with youth from various socio-economic backgrounds, we must be sensitive to the needs of the youth and the fiscal ability of the parents. We must assure no one is embarrassed or exempt for avoidable reasons.

Ministry Journey

When I was twelve years old, I joined the Teens for Christ Ministry at First Baptist Church of Hillside. At fifteen, I was the recording secretary. At school, I was not well accepted or popular, but when I came to youth ministry, I found a place where I was

⁶ Jualynne E. Dodson and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "'There's Nothing Like Church Food,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIII, no. 3 (1995): pp. 519-538, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/1465091>.

accepted among my peers. From 2002 –2004, I was the president of the youth group. It required me to lead worship on Youth Sundays. In 2008, I served in youth ministry by assisting the leader. At the request of the youth, Bible study was incorporated into their meetings. The youth leader delegated this task to me.

In 2009, I recall the youth leader informing me she was going to be stepping down. I recall being uncertain if this were the task the Lord wanted me to do. I prayed about it and for the very first time, I heard the voice of the Lord clearly on a Sunday morning. God said, “I want you to lead my children.” At the time, I was not an official member of the church, which was required to lead the program. I asked the Lord to place my brother and the youth leader near me on the day I was to join. That day, they were sitting near me, and I joined the church. I served as the director of the Youth Ministry as a lay leader.

In November 2011, I recall being in school at Montclair State University. I was almost done with my bachelor’s degree. Something felt misaligned, so I prayed for clarity. I asked God to come down in a way that I know that it is God, call me by my name and tell me what it is that I was supposed to do. Three weeks later, my pastor Rev. Christopher Jones came out of the pulpit after preaching the sermon and said “Cassandra, I have been meaning to tell you this for three weeks. You were called to preach the gospel.” Upon this declaration, I became a minister in training.

During my field education in 2016, I birthed the Young Disciples Youth Ministry at First Baptist Peddie Memorial Church. In May 2017, I received my Master of Divinity from New Brunswick Theological Seminary and was licensed as a minister of the gospel. I served as the youth minister at Peddie Church in 2018. Upon my return to the First

Baptist Church of Hillside, I served as an associate minister. I am currently serving as youth minister over the VIBE Youth Ministry.

Spirits need to be fed the word of God and be actively engaged to find their God-given identity. Becoming actively engaged in the word and in prayer revealed my identity. Hunger for the word and a thirst for righteousness ensued. Spiritual growth is intentional. The word is our spiritual food, prayer is our tool for building our relationship with God and Community service teaches us to serve as the world is greater than what we see. A balance is needed individually and corporately as a community of believers provides the support to encourage the youth to live counterculturally.

Synergy

The pandemic has normalized being in a digital or virtual space. Unfortunately, the universal church became accustomed to being disengaged with only the exception of Sunday Morning Worship. The community as a whole needs to reacclimate to coming together. Christ sat alone with God the Father. However, once Christ finished sitting with God, He remained among a community. People need each other. We were not meant to live in isolation. There is something about gathering and having support with others that can be an opportunity to support, encourage and inspire one another.

Coming together to be discipled is the challenge we face. Historically, the church has been a place to dress up and look good on the outside regardless of how we are doing or feeling. People leave the church compartmentalized to the time of gathering among the saints and leave behind the church disposition as well. Real transformation and healing

fail to occur because we have learned to put a bandage over a wound that has been festering. The problem only intensifies by remaining unaddressed. When we come together, we should be sharing our burdens with one another and experiencing some encouragement to continue doing what is right even when tempted to act unethically. Some encouragement may require advising someone to seek professional counsel, but people still need to be around people. Some people only receive affection when among the church. We should not neglect to come together.

Christ often gathered around the table. Without assembling, we will not be able to determine what will work for our context. Encouraging parents and youth to provide honest feedback in reference to the activities and gatherings sustains youth ministry. Creating a community for both the youth and the parents to enjoy will be vital both to launching and maintaining the youth ministry. This community provides support and encouragement to others. The hope is to create fellowship among the parents as supporters of one another as well.

Growing up in the church, there was some terminology I heard and did not quite understand. Using context clues is not the best method to define words. When I teach the youth, I make sure they understand every word in the lesson. First, I ask if anyone knows what a word like “repent” means and if no one responds, I come prepared with definitions. Teaching also requires the teacher to remain a student of the word and to remain prayerful over each lesson that is being taught. One should be assured everything God wants to proclaim through scripture is conveyed in the lesson.

The youth in the church should learn how to serve the community, but while they serve doing so they need to understand some basic theology and what it means to have a

relationship with God. We must create an atmosphere where we are meeting the youth where they really are emotionally rather than just inundating them with information.

Youth are dealing with various levels of experience in the home. Some have excellent homes: spiritually, physically and emotionally. They need to understand what they experience at home does not have to define them. They are unique and need to discover who they are in Christ not who they present on Snapchat or TikTok. After the trauma we have all experienced through the pandemic, teens must get reacclimated to doing things in person.

Being raised in the church, I could educate the youth on the foundational identity of God. Christianity is not about rules and regulations to fulfill. It is about having an authentic relationship with God. It requires getting to know who God is and learning about the three persons of the God head: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is about understanding why we need Jesus, what agape love is, and understanding what the atonement and repentance means. Getting to know God should influence how they approach decisions in the future. With Christ as their Lord, they will become true disciples. Being a disciple often infers a love for the Word of God and a desire to be around the body of believers.

The church needs to revive a ministry that has been dormant for a few years. With the break of activity in the ministry, the church needs a vibrant ministry that not only reaches the youth within the church but also reaches the youth in the community. The youth need a space to create authentic relationships with God and each other. Since this particular church was birthed out of a children's ministry, people who are new to the church must be taught our children are equally important as anyone else in the family.

Space has been created for them to grow in their own way with judgment-free zones to nurture the focus on Christ, understanding their gifts and their purpose. Youth ministry should shape the minds of young Christians for them to be disciples of Christ first and for those who have a specific calling to be taught how to operate in the calling now. The youth are the future of the church and we must encourage them to pray daily, to worship God alone and corporately, to read their Bibles regularly and to serve as Christ did. Youth ministry should affirm their value to God, so they seek God's validation more than anyone else's and breathe life into the youth rather than burden them with rules that eclipse their view of the Son. The passion for Christ and love for one another should be nurtured so they learn to love others unconditionally.

The youth need the basics of the faith to be retaught in depth. The Bible studies should include the triune God, the effects of sin, the doctrine of atonement, the resurrection, the love of God and the marks of discipleship. Having an environment that allows them to be honest facilitates transparency to meet them where they are so they can grow. We need a youth ministry that is more than teaching them to be good church members; we need a youth ministry that teaches them to be disciples of Christ. In encouraging discipleship, we will still be able to discern who has the calling on their lives to serve as the future leaders of the church.

A key component of the youth ministry will be parental engagement. As the parents are the ones who are responsible for the youth who come to the events, they must understand the purpose of the ministry. Parents are the stakeholders in the youth

ministry.⁷ If the parents are not invested, we will not have the support we need for the youth. The parent or guardian is and has always been the biggest teacher in the youth's life. A child learns by what is modeled to them at home. If the parent comes to church but the life fails to reflect agape love, the parent lacks a deep relationship with Christ.⁸ We all must learn how to actively participate in our own development so we can grow and be better not only in the four walls of the church edifice but more over at home and in the world. Without this transformation and the evidence of agape love, we will repel rather than attract others for Christ.

Failing to engage with the parents will eventually cause the ministry to lose its biggest supporters. Parents need to be addressed as stakeholders and the ministry. This does not require the youth pastor to abandon their God-given vision for the ministry, but it does require us to share our vision with parents and gauge their responses⁹. The response could lead us to determine it is not time for one activity but for another. The leader must have buy-in from the parents. Some parents are already enthused because the church is giving their teenagers a space to grow in Christ. All the answers are not among the leadership and each context and concern will vary. Dialogue is imperative to making necessary shifts in the ministry to remain effective and relevant to one's context.

Activities do not have to be costly or elaborate but they do have to be engaging. There are Bible games available and there are games you can create. Bible games are an opportunity to teach about different stories. Use the opportunity to inquire into what does

⁷ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, and Carl S. Dudley et al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 66.

⁸ Galatians 5:19-23

⁹ James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2003), 182-185.

the story mean, why did it happen or who is that person. It is a fun way to learn more about the Bible and it sparks curiosity in the ones who do not know the answer. Games such as Bible Mad Gab, Bible Outburst, Bible Pictionary, and Bible Taboo do not require Biblical knowledge but knowing the Bible helps for the people guessing and the one giving the clues. These are just a few examples of available Bible trivia games and apps. Share the games with the parents as well as the youth. Combine lessons from Sunday school, Sunday morning worship, and Bible study. Once the youth have come together in person, they will enjoy each other's company. Coming together is the opportunity for the fellowship to be around the Word. There should be time to gather in the church edifice for a couple of hours and we can play icebreaker games that will help them learn about one another as well. Icebreakers are always wonderful for opening dialogue. Asking questions about their favorite color, playing two truths and a lie or asking them if they had a superpower what it would be, anything that is along the lines of getting to know God and each other should be part of the agenda.

Parental meetings require building a rapport with the parents, discovering their needs,¹⁰ and how we are able to provide support from a ministerial standpoint. What are the most dominant needs among the youth? What would the parents like to see happen? What are the priorities among the youth and parents? These questions must be revisited periodically. As new youth enter and new ideas emerge, there will need to be consistent engagement with parents. The meetings with the youth should also fuel ideas for activities going forward. The youth's requests should be brought to parents for feedback as well. When parents are fully invested and engaged, they invest their time and resources

¹⁰ James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2003), 144-145.

if they can. Help is not only needed in the form of fiduciary support, but it also includes people who are willing to help put the activities together, people who can organize and people willing to set up and clean up.

With input from the youth and the parents, the overlapping dominant needs should be unearthed. Youth ministry, while it is a ministry, should also incorporate aspects of the vision of the entire church. Any activity chosen should not stray from the church's mission statement or vision but incorporate it into the teaching and activities. My context uses Matthew 28:19-20 for the mission statement, "Reaching the city for Jesus Christ, One Family, One Heart, One Soul, One Mind at a Time." Our ministry should include teaching about Christ to give the youth confidence to reach others for Christ as well. Understanding the love of God and the significance of God's sacrifice when revealed by the Holy Spirit motivates us to tell others. The news of the cross should not be antiquated information or taken nonchalantly but inspire us to learn more about God and to build our relationship with Him.

Leading must be done among the community rather than over it. The parent's observations and desires for their children in the church are critical and beneficial to the ministry. As I engage with the parents on a more personal level, we all can benefit and grow in Christ as we discern God's will together for the youth.¹¹ Voiced concerns and honest feedback will be different in every context. Leadership must empower the youth and parents to be participants in the development and nurturing of the youth.

¹¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2002), 57-63.

Empowering others will enhance the role of the leadership not diminish it.¹² When the vision is shared clearly and others agree with it, the ideas will begin to flow regarding what to do. People will become excited and want to participate and help accomplish goals together. This expands the reach of the leader when the God-given vision is received by the parents and it creates a community continually caring for and supporting the youth through their adolescence.

When one has a vision for the youth ministry, one should slowly introduce these ideas and request feedback. The engagement will help you gauge what best for your community. Requesting the parents to come in person would have to be at a time that is most convenient for the majority of the parents. In some cases, it may be following morning worship. The results of the feedback make a difference and will impact how you proceed. You need to see reactions and responses. Also, the parent meeting must be something they look forward to doing. Youth ministry is very contextual. Perfect framework for each ministry cannot be duplicated but the discernment process for the context can be. The discernment process needs the youth and the parent's involvement¹³. As culture constantly changes, the methods of communication and activities must adapt as well. Reteaching whom we worship is important. When you have a ministry open to all youth, the gospel is what saves. Without teaching Bible, we are nothing more than a social club. Christian ministry includes Bible study to teach about the triune God and in the words of Pauline scholar and professor, Dr. Virginia Wiles it encourages building a relationship with your Bible. A biblical foundation must be laid not just having outings

¹² James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2003), 183-185.

¹³ Mark Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry 3.0: A Manifesto of Where We've Been, Where We Are and Where We Need to Go* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 85-86.

for fun or gatherings solely for the relationship with each other but also to encourage a relationship with God. This is the church and anything without Biblical foundations, including traditions, is subject to reevaluation not just with the youth but with the parents as well.

Why is youth ministry not always a priority for some? Parents want the best for their children. Parents want children to have a strong sense of identity, to be happy and to be there for their children when life becomes difficult¹⁴. Will understanding the purpose of the youth ministry be instrumental to retention? The parents should continue to be informed and the spiritual formation for the youth must be clear. Fellowship, bible study and community service are imperative to spiritual formation. The community will support the youth as they discover who God created them to be. Spiritual friendships will help them bond and have godly relationships to help one another grow through accountability.

Youths often look for peer approval. They could come from an excellent home with wonderful parents, but their peers could be doing inappropriate or unethical activities that are considered cool. Because the majority of their time is spent with their peers, either they will be a good influence on their friends and the negative actions will cease or they will subconsciously adopt the negative habits of their colleagues.¹⁵ Youth spend more time with their friends whether in person or via a video game than they do with their parents as they get older. How the youth entertain themselves, whether viewing

¹⁴ Andrew Root, *The End of Youth Ministry?: Why Parents Don't Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do about It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020), 51-53.

¹⁵ Anne-Marie Ambert, *Parents, Children, and Adolescents: Interactive Relationships and Development in Context* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020), 95.

videos on TikTok or YouTube is part of the influence. Are they balancing negative images with positive ones? One of the Spiritual Disciplines that need to be incorporated is Spiritual Friendships¹⁶. This includes positive influences in cyberspace as well. We cannot and should not keep them in a space where they are solely in contact with Christian material; should be at least one peer in the circle of friends who is Christian and will encourage them to do the right thing.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, our church had quite a few gatherings. One Christian principle missing from the gatherings was opportunities for fellowship. An informal gathering for the parents is needed for them to experience the joy of fellowship with one another. The parents are already a part of a congregation that feels familiar and they can be around others who share common interests or people who look like them¹⁷. We must be sensitive to the needs of the community to avoid becoming insular. We must determine how we can serve the youth who are in our congregation and serve the youth in the community. Our youth ministry remains open to the community for all youth including those who have a church home but do not have a youth ministry.

Transformational leadership cannot begin without transforming ourselves. Currently, I am creating activities and spaces for the kids to enjoy and keeping the parents abreast of my ideas. Learning how to reorient from one who simply offers information to incorporating the parents as well as the youth into the decisions will create the basis for the activities chosen. Each parent meeting should include a recapitulation of what we have done so far and propose ideas on how we would like to proceed. By that

¹⁶ Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 101-103.

¹⁷ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, and Carl S. Dudley et al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 80.

time, I should be able to propose ideas the youth have incorporated as well, empowering the youth to understand the foundation of ministry so they are encouraged to come up with ideas that suit their interests and needs.¹⁸ Following each of the aforementioned ideas, there needs to be time for feedback from the parents. Planning must be done in advance and things should be shared early enough to gain the needed support.

Youth ministers or pastors need support as well. A council needs to be formed to assist with the execution of activities. Planning goes into the outings including budgeting costs and setting up activities. The council should include people with administrative skills, imagination, creativity, responsibility, trustworthiness, and willingness to do the work. At least one person on the council should be able to be a chaperone. Some people on the council will not even need to be involved directly with the youth.

Conclusion

Youth ministry must be a place youth are able to be authentic. The integrity of the space must remain safe, so they are able to share all that is on their hearts. Every decision made must be brought before the parents to keep them well informed and to keep their support. Every activity should not come solely from the youth minister but from the youth sharing things they would like to do as well. The council would be the executioners of the activities and would ensure that all parts would come together seamlessly.

The youth minister's responsibility is to meet with the three groups: the youth, the parents and the council. Youth should be supported by the council and their

¹⁸ James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2003), 183-185

parents to nurture their discipleship. When executed correctly, the youth ministry will seem to function easily and the youth will benefit. They will be developed as disciples of Christ and some will be future leaders in the church.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In the Bible, Mephibosheth was identified as crippled because of an injury that he sustained during his childhood. His nurse dropped him in an attempt to flee for safety. In an attempt to care for others, leaders often make mistakes that can hurt those they are leading. In biblical times, people with disabilities were not as readily accepted as they are today. Along with Mephibosheth's physical disability came other issues due to his family history and things he had to endure because of who his grandfather was.

Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan and the grandson of King Saul, the first king of Israel. Mephibosheth's father, Johnathan, was close friends with King David, and based on David's relationship with Jonathan, Mephibosheth was allowed to live even though it would have been customary to take his life once his grandfather was defeated in battle. Regrettably, this dynamic presented many challenges for Mephibosheth, but while he did not have to worry about King David taking his life, those who served King David were another matter. They sometimes raided houses and killed people in their homes. One who was loyal to David indulged King Saul when Saul knew there was no hope for him to survive his final attack. However, King David refused to harm King Saul as God's chosen.

This pericope is one of the few instances in which God chose not to heal Mephibosheth's injury in both his feet. Mephibosheth was crippled at an early age, and healing never took place, he just had to accept that he was walking with a permanent injury. He was forced to adapt to this new reality, and although Mephibosheth may have asked, scripture does not indicate him asking God to heal him. Neither does scripture disclose that Mephibosheth had a relationship with God at all.

Eventually, Mephibosheth recovered all he would have inherited as the grandson of King Saul. When brought back to the palace, he was not returning in a service capacity. As requested by King David, he was invited to sit at the king's table and was given a residence, land, and servants to assist him upon his return to the palace. As it was customary for the new king to assume authority after the death of a former king, tradition would call for Mephibosheth to be put to death. Furthermore, most people considered those with leprosy, the blind, and the lame as defiled. One did not interact with the lame, so it must have been an enormous shock when David invited the lame to become part of his household and to eat with the king.

Through the story of Mephibosheth, one can surmise that not all wounds will be healed, one should never break the covenant, and restoration can happen even if some injuries never heal. Although the injury was not Mephibosheth's fault, it impacted him for the rest of his life; God elected not to heal his wound supernaturally. David's keeping of the covenant caused an unusual situation to occur, but God honors those who keep the covenant. David obtained the resources to provide Mephibosheth with all that belonged to his grandfather. Even though his feet were never healed, he was blessed materially despite the stigma he endured as a lame man.

Mephibosheth endured changes and challenges resulting from generational conflicts that began with his grandfather. Interestingly, he recovered an inheritance due to a generational covenant made by his father. One is not obligated to uphold the conflicts of one's past, but one can change the trajectory of what happens with one's children when one decides to handle things better. The love David and Jonathan shared preserved the life of Mephibosheth. Even though King Saul did not make Jonathan an heir to the throne, Mephibosheth inherited the home that had belonged to his grandfather.

Setting

This scenario occurred in a couple of places: the city of Lo Debar and the palace of King David. One could imagine the luxury of King David and the large rooms. Multiple houses in a palatial complex that he could allot to Mephibosheth later. Lo Debar is a city in Gilead east of the Jordan River. The Jordan River is in Southwest Asia in the Middle East, and it has the lowest elevation of rivers worldwide.¹ It is located north of the Jabbok, east of Mahanaim, and south of the Sea of Chinnenn (also known as the Sea of Chinnereth, Lake of Gennesaret, and Sea of Galilee). Gilead was an area of ancient Palestine.² Mephibosheth resided in the house of Machir, son of Ammiel.

¹ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Jordan River," Encyclopedia Britannica, November 25, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jordan-River>.

² Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Gilead," Encyclopedia Britannica, July 21, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gilead-ancient-region-Palestine>.

Mephibosheth resided in the city of Lo Debar, a region of Gilead. This area by the Jordan was known for its fertility and often served as a place of refuge.³ The tribes of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh resided in Gilead; however, some scholars suggest that Lo Debar was not considered an Israelite region. Because his grandfather, King Saul, was the initial king of the nation of Israel, he was taken to an area outside of the tribes of Israel as a child. Given Mephibosheth's disability, he had to go somewhere safe so he could survive. Some scholars suggest the city of Lo Debar was undesirable; however, other research shows that some areas in the city were known for fertility.⁴

The Transjordan region of Gilead is composed entirely of a huge block of Cenomanian limestone.⁵ Lo Debar, being near this region, could suffer from issues with the fertility of the land. In an agrarian society, one would not be considered fortunate to reside in a location that could not produce crops. One would not want to live near an area where grass did not grow during a time when animals were the method of transportation.

Conflict

King David and the house of King Saul were at war. Although Jonathan and David were friends, Jonathan was one of King Saul's sons. King Saul and his sons had lost their lives in battle, and everyone in the family was eliminated. Saul's son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth's nurse heard the news of Saul's murder,

³ Christina Bosserman, "Gilead," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁴ Christina Bosserman, "Gilead," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁵ Brandon Ridley, "Transjordan," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

picked him up, and fled. It was customary for a new king to kill all the descendants of the former king to prevent rival claims to the throne.⁶ At five years old, Mephibosheth fell and became crippled in both his feet. In this case, he was under his nurse's care, and when she mishandled him, the accident left Mephibosheth with permanent damage. One could only imagine how painful it was to fall so hard that both feet were unable to return to how they were before the injury.

According to 2 Samuel 5:8, David drew an analogy between the Jebusites and the blind and the lame, stating that he despised both. David had no desire to assist those who were lame. Moreover, they were forbidden from entering the city, especially the palace⁷. However, his belief in the anointing of Saul, although Saul made several attempts to take David's life, and the covenant he made with Saul's son Jonathan, outweighed these issues. David revered the Lord and those whom the Lord had chosen. Although we know David was imperfect, he was the only one noted in the Bible as a man after God's own heart. The irony is that someone from a wealthy family with an impressive stature was the king but felt threatened by someone who came from a family without social status and who worked as a shepherd.

History

Scholars suggest his original name was Merib-Baal, as referenced in 1 Chronicles 8:34; 9:40; however, he was called Mephibosheth because he "humiliated" or "shamed"

⁶ Larry V. Brown, "Mephibosheth, Son of Jonathan." In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁷ Rod Thompson, "Mephibosheth at the Table," in *Theology and the Experience of Disability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Voices Down Under* edited by Andrew Picard and Myk Habets (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), 150.

David in the Torah⁸. Merib-Baal means “Baal is my advocate”⁹, “Baal contends” or “Baal’s warrior.”¹⁰ Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, who was excluded as an heir when he assisted David’s escape. Although Saul was God’s chosen, all God’s people had been warned over generations not to mix with others because they would worship false gods, which is why the name of the grandson of the king signified that his parents worshipped Baal. To conceal his identity, he was renamed Mephibosheth at some point, which meant exterminating the idol.¹¹ No records exist of who changed his name or when his name was changed. Ba’al was a Canaanite storm god who brought rain to sustain crops, animals, and people. “As the storm god and bringer of rain, Baal was recognized as sustaining the fertility of crops, animals, and people. His followers often believed that sexual acts performed in his temple would boost Baal’s sexual prowess and thus contribute to his work in increasing fertility.”¹²

Obscure family dynamics sociologically impact an individual’s worldviews. Obscurity is normal, and what is the norm is idyllic or even foreign. When bizarre concepts surround certain people, they think this is normal. One can develop coping mechanisms to believe this dysfunction is normal and even think that when one is harmed,

⁸ Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2006), 35.

⁹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/meriyb-baal.html>

¹⁰ James Hastings, John A. Selbie, John C. Lambert, and Shailer Mathews. 1909. In *Dictionary of the Bible*. (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons), 604.

¹¹ *Mephibosheth Meaning – Hebrew Lexicon | Old Testament*
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/mephiyosheth.html>.

¹² Winfried Corduan, “Baal.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

it is one's fault regardless of circumstances and that one will try to do all the right things to avoid punishment. One's family can fortify or cripple one. It can cause one to be confused and even shut down. Mephibosheth was raised in fear, knowing people wanted to eliminate Saul and his descendants.

Mephibosheth was born into a family in which his grandfather dealt with insecurity. When his grandfather was first called to the throne by the prophet Samuel, he was introduced to the people. When they asked where he was, he was hiding among the baggage¹³. Although he became a strong leader, Saul was intimidated by David's success.¹⁴ However, Jonathan loved David and saved his life by helping him to escape Saul. Saul used his daughter's love for David to deceive him and others into believing he had gained favor publicly when his motive was to weaken him before another battle with the Philistines. Saul made Jonathan an oath that he would not kill David, but he attempted multiple times afterward. After David fled, there was no mention of Jonathan until his death. Fear caused Saul to act out of character, and that fear evolved into anger.

Lo Debar is a town near Manasseh, east of the Jordan River, which in Hebrew means "not a pasture," "no word," "to him a word," or "to speak."¹⁵ Mephibosheth went from living as part of and among the royal family to living in a lonely place where the banished and forgotten reside. Only God knows how he was treated when he was considered the lowest of the low and cursed. He was a pariah. Living in a place without pasture or fertile land, he had a higher risk of going hungry. He must have grieved the life

¹³ 1 Samuel 10:21-22, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 408.

¹⁴ 1 Samuel 18:6-20, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 420-21.

¹⁵ Phil Logan, "Lo-Debar," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1044.

he knew, his father and his grandfather. To have all he was familiar with removed in an instant by a lifelong injury put him at greater risk for harm. Being lame stopped him from running, so he was now vulnerable to those who sought to take his life for the sins of his grandfather. He needed to live somewhere no one would look for him. Although dreary, it was safe. One would not think to look for royalty in a place of exile. If one were to seek the descendants of Saul and one did not find them in the kingdom, one would seek them among their allies in a place comparable to the one they left.

In the time he lived in Lo Debar, he must have seen others who were not accepted, may have been unable to work, and struggled to survive. There is no refuge when you have a faith that dictates such a separation. One is an outcast in society and the temple because one is considered unclean or cursed.¹⁶ Although society does not dictate what one believes, the surrounding community can influence one. If one lives in a society among people who have been rejected, one may gain a sense of community and feel supported. Because Mephibosheth was living with Machir, Machir was likely a supporter of Saul.¹⁷

Cause of Trauma

The nurse's responsibility was to care for Mephibosheth, but in her haste to ensure he was protected, she left him with an injury that crippled him. She was doing

¹⁶ Leviticus 21:18-20, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Faithlife LLC, "Machir (son of Ammiel)." Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Factbook*. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, LLC, December 2, 2023. <https://ref.ly/logos4/Factbook?ref=bk.%23Machir.2>.

what she was supposed to, but in her haste to flee, she left him with permanent damage to his feet. If she had properly cared for him while she was escaping, he would not have been crippled. How do you deal with causing someone harm when you are doing the right thing? Caregivers can acknowledge their mistakes. If the caregiver acknowledges the error, then the child learns that everyone makes mistakes, and it becomes normal to apologize or ask for forgiveness when one has caused another pain. One does not learn that people in authority have no remorse or are not required to acknowledge their mistakes. What a caregiver does or neglects to do teaches the one in his or her care by modeling the correct or incorrect behavior.

God allowed Mephibosheth to fall as a message to the parents but still allowed Mephibosheth to walk. Instead of Mephibosheth being a paraplegic, he was lame but could still move independently. What surrounded Mephibosheth impacted him. The lack of adequate medical attention meant that, thenceforth, he was completely crippled.¹⁸ There are instances in which God will heal and restore people instantaneously; however, sometimes God will allow people to sustain permanent injuries such as this one. It is often stated that everything happens for a reason, yet how does one explain a child being injured to the point of disability because of someone else's mistake? How does one explain, in this instance, physical trauma that did not heal properly? In the first couple of chapters that listed the change in his name, what is the significance of his being crippled?

One would assume that if one takes all the precautions imaginable, one could avoid injuring those under one's care. A child at such a young age is impressionable and often energetic. Many children at the tender age of five love to run and play. The text

¹⁸ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Mephibosheth," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1439.

does not fully disclose what was happening when the nurse fled; it only discloses the origin of the disability. The nurse was being chased, and she needed to escape. We are sure the nurse was trying to protect Mephibosheth and save his life. Although the narrative could have turned out differently, the story teaches us that even if we endure a crippling injury in our life's journey, God covers us from what could have resulted in death. The situation may have hindered us, but God still filtered what could have been death to become an injury instead.

In this pericope, the nurse did not have malicious intent. Her actions suggest that she was trying to preserve Mephibosheth's life. Customarily, when a king was killed, the successor would also murder any family to prevent retaliation. Knowing that Mephibosheth was the king's grandson, the nurse attempted to preserve his life by fleeing. She did the correct thing, and she saved his life, but it caused a permanent injury. If the nurse had not done anything, would Mephibosheth have been alive? David respected Saul and his family. David had two opportunities to kill Saul but refused because he was the Lord's anointed. In 1 Samuel 20:14-15, when Saul sought David's life, David promised Jonathan that he would always show kindness to his family. However, those who followed David did not always uphold the same reverence for the Lord's anointed. David kept the promise and slaughtered those who had assassinated Saul's family.

In an instant, a child could no longer walk as well. During a time when society was neither kind nor understanding to persons with disabilities, Mephibosheth was forced to acclimate to the world, walking with a permanent injury. At this time, people were not welcoming. In Leviticus 21:18-19, the Lord spoke to Moses, declaring instructions for holiness, stating that no one who is lame or has a crippled foot can come near the altar to

offer sacrifices to the Lord. In this instance, Mephibosheth was considered defiled by society and experienced exile. He was treated as if he were carrying a contagious disease, and we witness this internalization in 2 Samuel 9 when he referred to himself as a dead dog. One must have extremely low or nonexistent self-esteem to view oneself as a dead animal. Possibly dealing with depression, Mephibosheth must have struggled to find joy during a perilous time. He was five years old and was taken from home, ending up in a place that reinforces the lack of individual value. Individuals become stuck or conditioned to internalize the negativity. If everyone sees them this way, their claim must be valid. Everyone cannot be wrong, so they must be wrong. Most people rejected Mephibosheth and were condescending or insulting, so he must not belong in society because he was the lowest of the low, and no one wanted him around. The name suggests that he had constantly been the object of ridicule and had learned self-abasement.¹⁹

When the nurse injured him, it restricted his physical ability to run. The injury, as well as society, impacted how Mephibosheth viewed himself. In 2 Samuel 9:8, Mephibosheth referred to himself as a dead dog. His formative years are not recorded in detail; however, one can imagine the impacts on his self-esteem. Most people with disabilities during that time were outcasts in society. They were often ignored, exiled, and known for being beggars; some considered them cursed. When he was injured, it changed the trajectory of his life. He had little to no self-esteem or self-worth. To liken himself to a dog suggests that Mephibosheth saw himself as less than human. Furthermore, he compared himself to a dead dog lacking life, suggesting he did not care much about himself. Mephibosheth experienced depression from grief and rejection. He must have

¹⁹ Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2006), 111.

grieved the loss of his father and grandfather, the loss of his ability to walk properly, the loss of the palace he was raised in as his home, the loss of the level of safety he was accustomed to, and the change in support offered to him as someone who was now in danger. Grief can obscure one's worldview, especially if unaddressed.

Regal Summons

Although Mephibosheth was aware of the rules of society and the history of King David and his grandfather, he appeared before the king, unaware of King David's intention. When he approached King David, he inquired about the purpose of his call. Possible outcomes from the encounter included imprisonment or death. When one self-identifies as an enemy to the king or speaks of one's perception of the situation, one must be audacious to come to the king unaware of what the king will do. When called by the highest official at the time, anyone would be nervous, especially if authority figures have not called on them for a commendation. One might wonder what was done wrong instead of being excited to have an audience with the king. His faith in approaching the king worked for his benefit.

For one who is lame, one would need assistance to mobilize from location to location. Lameness indicates disabled victims who lay around markets and city gates of Jerusalem begging and annoying travelers (2 Samuel 5:6), often having to be carried by family members to strategic locations daily to beg for alms.²⁰ Most people avoided the

²⁰ Richard N. Jones, "Lame, Lameness," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 135.

lame, yet a lame man was called into the palace by a king. Even after Mephibosheth was told the purpose of the summons, he still replied with obeisance, demonstrating an act of worship or his inferiority to King David. His actions demonstrated that he did not count himself worthy of the blessings he had received. Although Mephibosheth was reinstated to all that had been taken from him, he viewed himself as a servant to the king and never counted himself as anything more.

Mephibosheth was afraid to approach King David. Scripture does not indicate that he had any contact with David, much less since his injury at five. When one is called before a king who was a known enemy of one's grandfather and does not care for those who are lame, one could be terrified to approach without being given a reason. Nothing indicates that Mephibosheth would have anything promising to look forward to. He expressed courage by entering the king's home.

Impact of Trauma

When David and Mephibosheth met, Mephibosheth did obeisance before David. Usually, a servant bows like this before a king, lord, or master. Mephibosheth was royalty according to tradition because he was the grandson of a king. However, he came before David as if he were not equal in society. If Mephibosheth had seen himself as a prince, he would not have felt obligated to display this type of respect to David. He had experienced life stripping him of his identity. If negative influences surround one, it diminishes one's self-worth. The damage allowed Mephibosheth to operate with humility; however, he saw himself as less than a servant.

Author Jeremy Schipper indicated that the term “dead dog” is only used three times in the Bible. Each instance includes a context where one was an enemy of the king. Some contexts include scenarios of intended usurpation.²¹ Perhaps Mephibosheth, clear on his familial history, was aware that he was an enemy of King David by societal standards. This may have been a colloquial expression indicating that he was completely aware that he was considered an adversary to the king. Considering the actions following his father’s death, it was clear that Mephibosheth was unaware of King David’s relationship, much less his covenant with his father, Jonathan. He hesitated to trust David’s amicable gesture and may have assumed this was to lull him towards his death. One could argue that being a dead dog could be synonymous with the more recent informal expression “dead meat.” Some scholars argue that the kind gesture was more about vigilance than upholding the covenant. However, David’s history shows that David had demonstrated that he could have taken King Saul’s life but elected not to take it.

Much like Mephibosheth, many are injured under the care of someone else, and it may be a result of the caregiver's teaching. How they were raised either begets a cycle or causes an aversion to adopting the teaching. What do you do when you were safe but now life is causing you to walk with a limp? The physically lame are the ones we can easily see; however, those who were verbally, emotionally, or sexually abused have an obscure view of a healthy relationship or self-worth. What you see growing up becomes normal, albeit toxic; unhealthy interactions are internalized. Being mishandled impacts how one interacts with the world. Apprehension or mistrust of those who care for you, fear from a

²¹ Jeremy Schipper, “Why Do You Still Speak of Your Affairs?': Polyphony in Mephibosheth's Exchanges with David in 2 Samuel,” essay, in *Vetus Testamentum* 54., vol. 3 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill NV, 2004), 344–51, 347-348.

lack of security, feeling like one must protect oneself because others have harmed or left the individual vulnerable may ensue. One must recover a sense of security to reach a place where love and belonging can be addressed.

It is impossible to be flawless. As humans, we make mistakes, but how do you assist someone to recover from an injury you caused? There is no further mention of the nurse in scripture. We are told nothing she did beyond injuring Mephibosheth. What does one do when everything was done to protect someone but caused a lifelong injury? She saved his life, and it is possible she took him to a place where people did not know who he was. The physical injury of Mephibosheth was never rectified; however, what was done to take care of the mental and emotional impacts that accompany the injury? No written record exists to show the nurse provided care. Since the nurse was with Mephibosheth during the injury, why was he improperly handled? As a nurse, she should be able to bandage him appropriately for his feet to heal properly. He was lame, but he was alive.

What do you do when you have an injury that God chooses not to heal? How do you contend with an injury that is not your fault yet impacts your life? The reality of life that is many things happen beyond our circumstances. Many have sustained invisible wounds, but not everyone has the resources to facilitate healing and some are in denial that there is an issue to begin with. How do we prevent the aftermath of an injury from becoming harmful behavior? We must be intentional about treating all the injuries. When a major injury is not treated, it can infect or heal incorrectly. One option is to treat the injury, which requires partnerships with those licensed to handle the injuries we are not trained to handle. One common response is to deal with it, but people cannot say how and

continue to coast through life broken when there may not be healing, but treatment is available. Once one is aware of the origin of the injury, healing can begin.

Mephibosheth acquired more than a physical injury. His physical injury altered his self-image. Mephibosheth also experienced grief after losing his father and grandfather at an early age. To see himself in such a lowly manner is unexpected for a person of royal descent. One would expect a sense of entitlement from Mephibosheth as if his position should have never been taken from him. Scripture does not indicate arrogance, just humility and appreciation for the relationship with David as a father figure he had lost to battle. He needed a father figure to care for him so a man could care for another man.

Reaction of the Person

When one has experienced a change, this does not mean one will automatically change one's mind when put into a new scenario. Mephibosheth's humility is admirable; nonetheless, it was the result of the tragedy of circumstances beyond his control. For one who has experienced trauma, one must work through the injury, whether verbal, emotional, or physical, to accept the blessings of God. As the church, we can be like the palace to which people are welcome to come and to have a place they belong. The church must learn how to support those who have dealt with trauma and to be patient. There may be some whom God chooses to heal; however, there may be others whom God chooses not to heal. King David demonstrated the correct thing to do in this instance. When there is a rightful heir to a throne, you restore to him what was lost and invite him to return to the seat at the table.

Mephibosheth expressed gratitude, and his response to David demonstrated he did not believe he deserved it. He was glad to eat at the table with the king as if he were his son. He was grateful to receive the property that belonged to his grandfather. His grandfather's servant, Ziba, his sons, and his servants cared for the land. He must have experienced some form of relief that he would not have to take care of the land with his physical limitations. He did not have to worry about tilling the land or collecting any produce. It would all be done for him. Returning from Lo Debar gave him a different location, but not a different self-perception.

Mephibosheth remained humble and still saw himself as a servant of the king. He did not even refer to himself as a prince. Later, when Mephibosheth met with David after Ziba's deceptive story, he still referred to himself as a servant.²² Mephibosheth demonstrated that even if one moves from a home to a palace, one should remain in a position to serve and choose to be humble. God honored this humility, yet there is no indication that Mephibosheth boasted about the lifestyle change. Mephibosheth was more grateful to be treated like family than for material blessings. He found contentment with the immaterial blessings. What meant more to him was that he was treated with love and made to feel like he belonged.

Summary

David gave a model of what can be done to those who have been mistreated. As a people under the Abrahamic covenant and adopted children of God, we are a part of the

²² 2 Samuel 19:24-30 *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 468.

royal priesthood. We cannot repair the damage done by what has happened in children's lives; however, we can work on restoring them spiritually. Teaching them about their identity in Christ is important for them to see themselves as part of the kingdom of God. David intentionally kept his promise to Jonathan to show kindness to his family. As Mephibosheth was the only one recorded as a survivor of Jonathan's lineage, he took care of Mephibosheth.

At this point, Mephibosheth returned to the palace he was taken away from as a child after he experienced life as a lame man in a city along the Jordan River. Mephibosheth experienced two major moves in his life that were antithetical. He began in a palace and then moved with a person who cared for him to a nonaffluent city. He experienced life as an outcast, returning to the palace in a similar capacity to the one he left. It was as if he was picking up where he left off: living in the palace, having all his needs met, and eating at the table with the king. Drastic transitions may not be easy because, in one instance, you lose your grandfather, your father, your home, and your ability to walk properly instantaneously, and now you return to a different leader who was your father's beloved friend and are being cared for as if you were a prince again.

As a king, David was able to bring Mephibosheth into the palace and have him treated as the prince Mephibosheth would have been if he had never fled. King David had the material means to provide all his needs even though he was still king. David showed him kindness that was restorative to Mephibosheth. He kept his vow to Jonathan that the friendship would span generations and treated Mephibosheth accordingly. What begins in one generation can impact the next; we must be mindful of how we treat others now. Generational trauma can be broken by an individual who decides to receive assistance to

sever the cycle. Generational blessings may also be the result of someone who was treated well.

In both Chapters 4 and 9, it is mentioned that Mephibosheth was lame in both feet. Restoration does not always mean that complete or supernatural healing will occur; everyone will overcome injuries or have perfect mental health. Unlike other narratives, this one does not include God healing or sending someone to heal him. Remarkably, Mephibosheth was still integrated into King David's house.²³ According to the standards of society, he would normally have become a beggar on the street, but as God would have it, the lame Mephibosheth, who should have been ostracized, was eating at the table of and residing with the King. Societal expectations do not exempt you from God-given promises. In this pericope, Mephibosheth's life was spared and he was treated like he was a son of the king.

As the church, we can provide a haven for youth to be accepted and taught that they are fearfully and wonderfully made²⁴. The church can teach them that they are forgiven, chosen, saved, and adopted into God's family through Jesus Christ.²⁵ Often, we are taught that we are sinners saved by grace; however, if a child has already been taught that he or she is not worth much, we do not need to reinforce this type of doctrine. Youth need to know the church is a place to express faith in Christ and love openly. They need a place to accept them and reaffirm their worth as they develop. The world values

²³ Henry P. Smith, "Samuel I and II," essay, in *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Norwood, MA: Norwood Press, 1899), 311.

²⁴ Psalm 139 *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003) 882-883.

²⁵ Ephesians 1:4-14 *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2091.

uniformity, and people who conform can often advance and obtain friends, but that is not a kingdom mindset. We must be a space in which unity is encouraged²⁶, where we support the youth and become a ground for them to encourage each other. Regardless of ethnic background and socioeconomic status, there is a place in the kingdom for all God's children.

We assist in discipling the youth via spiritual development, which will can act as a way of restoring them. If youth see themselves as lowly, we must encourage them to stay the course, albeit on a difficult road to journey on as adolescents. The teenage years are an interesting time in development. As one transitions to adulthood, events unaddressed or continuing through the formative years impact one's responses and trust. When one has endured verbal, emotional, or physical abuse as a child, the trauma could alter one's self-perception. Church is a safe space for youth to speak openly and honestly to release with what they are dealing. If needed, we can collaborate with the parent(s) to ensure the teen's spirit is being nurtured with us at the church and see how we can best support those who have endured some form of trauma.

Many people value their children and will do what is best for them. Understanding that not all environments and people are safe may cause doubt in a nation that consists of people who are Jewish and Gentile. If one comes from a background of atheism or polytheism, what would make one bring a child to a person who is proclaiming monotheism and allegiance to the God of Israel? Children, a vulnerable population who are susceptible to what they are taught, are brought to Jesus of Nazareth, otherwise recognized as the Christ or Messiah. Including the ones bringing those children

²⁶ Luke A. Powery and Willie James Jennings, *Becoming Human: The Holy Spirit and the Rhetoric of Race* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022), 50.

will spread the word further. Word of mouth is an extremely powerful tool of evangelism. When people are blessed and transformation occurs, uncontrollable excitement happens, and people inevitably share the gospel.

Youth ministry must provide a safe environment for children to share their struggles and questions openly. When enveloped in prayer, a ministry can thrive. Our measure must be the quality of the impact, not the quantity of the people joining. As discipling impacts youth, the word will spread with the changes in children. Their parents will share the experience with other parents, and the youth will share a space with other youth. The epitome of the ministry must be Christ. We exist because Christ came and laid down his life as a ransom for many. We are called to love God, one another, and share Christ's love in the world. If we fail to remember this, we fail our mission in the kingdom and become poor ambassadors for Christ.

Christ welcomed children, regardless of their race or gender. As it is the bride of Christ, the church would be acting counter to Christ's entire ministry should we suggest that anyone is not welcome or that love is reserved only for those who believe. Christ instructed the disciples to let the children come. As they develop, they will have a solid foundation rather than needing to rebuild themselves later. If we cease to teach the children the biblical identity of Christ, the light in the world will begin to fade as darkness becomes more prominent.

When people come to Christ, we need not wait for them to become older before we can teach them. We meet them where they are and work to care for them. Follow Christ's example and do not hinder the children. The kingdom of heaven is also theirs right now. Teach them that they have a place in the kingdom and their voices matter, so

they will learn that what they say and do can impact the world around them. Empower them to be audacious as much as loving to follow Jesus and to develop a relationship with Jesus of their own. Jesus is not just for adults but for youth as well.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

In 1918, the second most severe pandemic in history, the Great Influenza epidemic or the Spanish flu, impacted everyone and claimed millions of lives. People were quarantined in their homes. Children were not allowed to leave their backyard.¹ The once-busy streets and highways filled with traffic became vacuous. Nonessential stores and services were closed. Hospitals filled with so many people that other edifices became utilized as alternate sites for providing hospital care. Masks were used to reduce the spread of the disease. Experiencing a quarantine is difficult and mental health impacts on quarantined individuals. Spanish flu was the penultimate global pandemic that claimed millions of lives. Many parallels existed between the era of the Spanish flu and the COVID-19 pandemic therefore we know the world will resume beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Children survived while many lost their parents.² Some children were unaware of the magnitude of the tragedy and enjoyed the extended school break. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has lasted approximately 3 years, is now on the decline. We

¹ “Kids Coping - the 1918 Influenza Pandemic,” NZ History New Zealand History (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, January 8, 2015), <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/sound/kids-coping-the-1918-flu-pandemic>.

² “Kids Coping - the 1918 Influenza Pandemic,” NZ History New Zealand History (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, January 8, 2015), <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/sound/kids-coping-the-1918-flu-pandemic>.

experienced quarantine and businesses closing. The difference between the era of the Spanish flu and now is the advanced technology. Technology allowed us to take work laptops home, begin remote learning from public school, etc. Fortunately, people in the early 1900s did have the telephone available to call one another; however, the quarantine did impede many jobs which were only accessible in person.

Parents were hesitant to send their children back to school. They were not thrilled with the risk involved in catching the Spanish flu. Dr. Royal Samuel Copeland reopened schools in New York City because he believed, considering the poor housing conditions, that schools were more sanitary than people's homes. The condition was that they instituted medical examinations in the school for the returning children.³ While a few parents allowed this, many decided to keep their children home. In Chicago, John Dill Robertson, the Health Commissioner, advocated school openings for the same reasons as Dr. Copeland. Absentees soared from thirty percent to fifty percent.⁴

Spanish influenza was first heard about around September 7, 1918. Many people suffering from this disease as well as pneumonia were filling the hospitals. No treatment existed for either disease and all doctors could do at the time was treat patients well by feeding them, giving them blankets and telling them to go out into the fresh air.⁵ When there is an unknown disease rapidly spreading and causing mortality, the first thing that

³ Howard Markel, "Analysis: Why Some Schools Stayed Open during the 1918 Flu Pandemic," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, July 14, 2020), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/amp/health/analysis-why-some-schools-stayed-open-during-the-1918-flu-pandemic>.

⁴ Howard Markel, "Analysis: Why Some Schools Stayed Open during the 1918 Flu Pandemic," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, July 14, 2020), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/amp/health/analysis-why-some-schools-stayed-open-during-the-1918-flu-pandemic>.

⁵ Alfred W. Crosby, "The Great Shadow," In *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3-14.

happens is a quarantine to prevent the disease from spreading⁶. The disease is easier to manage and fewer people are going to be infected. Understanding that every disease transmits differently, one could understand why quarantine was a required health safety precaution. When an illness spreads rapidly, one may assume the possibility of it being airborne and it makes sense for people to remain separate until the number of people infected decreases or a remedy is discovered.

Schools were closed down and people were quarantined in their homes to keep people safe from infection, to contain those who have become ill and to reduce the spread of the virus. It is better to isolate a sickness and to confirm who is infected. Any precaution to keep people alive will be utilized. In every pandemic, a segment of the population is often at a higher risk of fatality, in the influenza of 1918 pandemic those in their 20s and 30s were at higher risk⁷. If someone contracted influenza at school and had no symptoms, they could spread it to the teachers or students. During COVID-19, those who had pre-existing conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes or asthma were at a higher risk.

A pandemic requires the disease or virus to spread globally. When someone became infected with influenza in the military, it was inevitable that others in close proximity would become infected as well. Today, it is known that influenza spreads via droplets from other people who have it. Once one encounters these droplets, there is a great probability that they will contract influenza.

⁶ Laura Spinney, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Langara College, 2021), 91-93.

⁷ Laura Spinney, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Langara College, 2021), 78-80.

Respiratory infections can spread easily between people. Sneezing, coughing, singing, and talking may spread respiratory droplets (aerosols) from an infected person to someone close by. Airborne infections can spread without necessarily having close contact with another person via small respiratory particles. Droplets from the mouth or nose may also contaminate hands, cups, toys, or other items and spread to those who may use or touch them, particularly if they then touch their nose or mouth. These can penetrate deep into the lungs.⁸

People are encouraged to wash their hands not only for sanitation reasons but to reduce the spread of the virus. If someone touches a surface with droplets on their hands, it can spread to anyone who comes in contact with it.

On March 4th, 1918, people developed a high fever and back-breaking body aches. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did not exist then and the virus spread among people serving in the military. It was indicated that the virus was aviary or came from Birds initially.⁹ It was believed it was only going to last 3 days until the death toll rose. No one spoke about it until the uncensored media in Spain did when their King was infected and the Spanish transit system shut down giving the virus the name the “Spanish flu.” The virus’ origin remains unknown. Similar symptoms such as fever and body aches were prevalent for the people who were infected. During the onset of the pandemic, World War I was already happening. In places where the people needed to be separated, troops were unable to separate. The troops were affected primarily because once one of them was infected, the others would be and everyone would remain unaware until the symptoms appeared. Troops could not simply suspend the war because a quarantine was

⁸ “What Infections Are, How They Are Transmitted and Those at Higher Risk of Infection,” *GOV.UK*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/what-infections-are-how-they-are-transmitted-and-those-at-higher-risk-of-infection#:~:text=Airborne%20or%20droplet%20spread&text=Sneezing%2C%20coughing%2C%20singing%2C%20and,person%20via%20small%20respiratory%20particles>.

⁹ Anthony S. Fauci, Anderson Cooper, and Cable News Network, dirs. 2020, “Pandemic: How a Virus Changed the World in 1918” A CNN Special Report: How a Virus Changed the World in 1918, 2020.

needed, which complicated the safety of the enlisted individuals. Because men were becoming sick at an alarming rate and there was lack of voluntary troops, military drafting was necessary.

Implicit bias is exhibited in the name of a disease. One can assume that the name “Spanish flu” gave the disease an origin in Spain.¹⁰ There must have been a stigma against the Spanish people when the country’s name was attached to influenza. People blame others for spreading disease when they are victims as well. Now, the World Health Organization intentionally does not name diseases after a community or place to prevent stigmatization and xenophobia. When COVID-19 was briefly referred to as the Wuhan coronavirus or as the Chinese coronavirus by the former president, businesses, restaurants and communities were greatly impacted. Three years into the COVID pandemic, Chinatown in New York City has yet to fully recover. Stigmatization created great apprehension and people refrained from patronizing Chinese businesses, restaurants and traveling to China. Thankfully, all stigmas are not permanent and people do not always adopt them as stereotypes. Over time stigmas can dissipate and no longer remain a concern.

Spain was affiliated with influenza solely because they were the first to acknowledge it in their country since their officials became infected with the virus.¹¹ Why was every other country overlooked, especially since the earliest cases were found

¹⁰ Trevor Hoppe Ph.D., “‘Spanish Flu’: When Infectious Disease Names Blur Origins and Stigmatize Those Infected,” *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 11 (June 17, 2018): 1462–1464, <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2018.304645>. <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/spanish-flu-when-infectious-disease-names-blur/docview/2124046607/se-2>
<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304645>.

¹¹ Sverre-Erik Mamelund. "Profiling a Pandemic." *Natural History, Suppl. Special Issue: Epidemics*, 09, 2017, 6, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/profiling-pandemic/docview/1939752522/se-2>.

in Kansas, right here in the United States? Every other country had censure in their media and the only one that did not exercise censure became affiliated with the influenza virus, although Spain was not the origin. Similar to when a distinct trait gives an individual a moniker, the nomenclature of Spanish flu lingered. A century later, the colloquial taxonomy continues sporadically as the Spanish flu, although it has been clarified that the origin of the virus is not Spain.

Spanish flu was later identified as Influenza A H1N1 which in more recent years has shifted to the latest vernacular Swine flu.¹² 1918 was the first time the virus was identified and named. Because many unknown variables existed, some adhered to the government-instituted quarantine instructions and others were dismissive. Fatalities existed primarily for those from 15-34 years of age. When people in perfect health lose their lives to a virus, it is extremely alarming. The window between contracting the virus and death was so narrow, there was little hope for survival.

According to the Military Medical and Surgery vol 71 number 13 American medical association Sept 1918, the second wave of influenza spread and was more deadly than the initial one. People were dying 24 hours after the first symptoms appeared. In Camp Devens, people turned purple and black from a lack of oxygen and choked on their own body fluids and turned blue. Asphyxiation caused them to choke to death, which is similar to drowning. With little time, nurses were usually unable to save their lives. As preciously stated, people in the military were being infected at alarming rates. No separation was possible because they had to be in rooms together. They had to travel

¹² Douglas Jordan, "The Deadliest Flu: The Complete Story of the Discovery and Reconstruction of the 1918 Pandemic Virus," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/reconstruction-1918-virus.html>.

together and were at war so they were also going to other countries. If a soldier contracted the disease and needed to be replaced, anyone who resided with them could have carried the disease and anyone new coming in could contract it as well.

Public health officials downplayed the severity of the virus. Parades were held to boost morale in Philadelphia. As a result, over 200,000 people fell sick and hospitals overflowed¹³ and people were dropping dead in the streets. Imagine the terror of knowing this disease could rapidly take your life within 24 hours or the horror of seeing dead people on the street. One can understand the mental health impacts on people living in fear; however, parades were irresponsible and extremely dangerous. People must understand the true severity of a disease to not be dismissive of how lethal it really is. Many became infected and died as a result of mass gatherings. If a nation is dealing with an unknown contagious viral infection, there should not have been any mass gatherings. If one has tinea corporis or conjunctivitis, he or she should be separated from others to avoid the risk of spreading highly contagious infections. Why was the parade allowed knowing that the effects of the Spanish flu were more severe? Officials should have considered what was best; boosting morale or keeping people safe.

Masks made with gauze were porous and less effective than they are now. Masks reduce the risk of contagion but do not eliminate the possibility of infection. Anything to reduce the spread of disease should be taken seriously. One can understand how wearing a mask all day can be frustrating. Anxiety from the terrifying reality of a fatal disease and the mask itself serves as a reminder that the disease is still prevalent. Masks restrict your breathing and airflow. When essential workers needed to work, they wore masks to

¹³ Anthony S. Fauci, Anderson Cooper, and Cable News Network, dirs. 2020. "Pandemic: How a Virus Changed the World in 1918" A Cnn Special Report: How a Virus Changed the World in 1918, 2020.

reduce the risk of getting sick. After months of wearing masks practically all day, people became irritated with the burden and were concerned with the long-term effects. No longer were the people considering the dangerous risk of contracting the disease, they were not afraid and they were just ready for the pandemic to end.

San Francisco ceased mass gatherings and closed movie theaters and schools. They removed the mask laws and people had anti-mask meetings. People became frustrated from wearing the masks for such a long time. By closing the city, they reduced the spread of the virus. A very wise decision to close places where large gatherings happen. Unfortunately, the lockdown was lifted too early and there was a third wave of outbreaks. By this time, people no longer wanted to abide by the rules. People protested wearing masks and resumed gatherings. Without taking the proper precautions, the virus began to spread again. A third wave began in France while Great Britain, France, Italy and the United States were preparing to have peace talks with the Germans. Around April 3rd, 1919,¹⁴ President Woodrow Wilson collapsed and later was physically weak and mentally impacted.

Conspiracy theories developed one of which was that the flu was hypothetical.¹⁵ Even though people were clearly informed of what was happening, people did not believe the flu even existed. One can understand the skepticism of such an extreme report. If a report of a viral infection is so extreme that people were dying instantly, people may doubt the authenticity of the story. However, when one sees the information in the newspaper, something should cause one to reconsider classifying the news as fallacious.

¹⁴ Norman A. Johnson, "The 1918 Flu Pandemic and Its Aftermath," *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 11, no. 1 (April 30, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12052-018-0079-5>.

¹⁵ Marta Gritti, "Stories of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic and Its Legacy," *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 20, no. 1 (January 2020): 36, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1473-3099\(19\)30710-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1473-3099(19)30710-8).

Would doctors inform people about a virus as part of a governmental deceptive ploy?

Certainly, there must be more to the story than a conspiracy. When one searches for information to only substantiate one's belief, one will find more information to support it whether based on fact or theory. All information is not supported by academic research. One must truly consider the sources of the information when deciding to assess what is based on a fact and what is based on theory.

Some believed influenza was produced as a biological weapon by a nation seeking to harm the United States.¹⁶ Because the pandemic ensued during World War I and the troops were notably impacted, a theory existed that a warring nation infected U.S. military personnel to deliberately make them sick. One can understand the attempt to reach an understanding while something so unpredictable is happening. One attempts to make sense of the world especially when it comes to finding the origin of a disease. When one can identify the root of a problem, one can work on the solution. However, people alter facts to support their beliefs something that may have started as initially plausible becomes unfounded and identified as purely theoretical. Fortunately, the unfounded theories about the Spanish flu eventually ceased.

Influenza greatly affected the nation. An article from Sept 20, 1919, described President Josiah P Landis, who fell ill with influenza during the previous year, which prevented him from attending commencement.¹⁷ Many were unable to function with influenza. Since it was contagious and people were still learning about it, keeping one's distance was the most responsible thing to do during that time of extreme uncertainty.

¹⁶ Laura Spinney, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World* (Vancouver, British Colombia: Langara College, 2021), 78-80.

¹⁷ "Personal Mention." *The Religious Telescope*. (Dayton, OH September 20, 1919), Vol. 85, No. 38. p 8-9.

People were unable to determine who was going to survive after becoming sick. Imagine being too sick to do the simple tasks pertaining to your job. The main channel for receiving news was the newspaper and communication was done via telegrams and the telegraph.

A letter was published by Mrs. George Thompson regarding the unexpected death of her husband due to influenza and pneumonia. She and her husband had seven children from the ages 2 months to 14 years old. Mrs. Thompson kept the infant and left the rest of her children in a home where they could care for children properly while she visited as often as she was able. The pandemic caused her to become a widow and prior to her husband's passing, they did agree on a place where the children would be sent. Thankfully, the children were not separated from one another in the home they resided in.¹⁸ Death tragically swept the nation and people were not prepared. Spouses, parents and children were lost and changes needed to be made for survival. A child at 2 months did not have the opportunity to know his or her father. For the Thompson family, there was a plan in place but not everyone had a plan. No one anticipated influenza would be so widespread much less anticipate dying from it or any related cause.

Emotional impacts during a time when the death toll was so high had to include a myriad of reactions, including overwhelming grief. Some lives were lost gradually and others instantaneously. People were shocked to see their loved ones earlier that morning only to discover that the same person had died en route to another destination. Before one can grieve, one must overcome shock. The amount of grief had to be tremendous at that

¹⁸ Mrs. George Thompson, "Does the Christian Life Pay? Read On," *Religious Telescope* (Dayton, OH December 20, 1919), Vol. 85 edition, sec. No. 51.

time, with daily deaths at record highs. Did people utilize psychologists via telephone appointment to cope with the shock of sudden losses and the depression that followed?

Walking down a desolate street and seeing someone who died lying there is traumatic. Cellular phones did not exist to call for help. Living in a pandemic that was highly contagious meant that one should not even check another person's pulse. The psychological of seeing death caused people to ignore the quarantine that was put in place for their safety. With anxiety mounting, people rebelled against what the government told them and ignored safety precautions because of an intense desire to return to "normal."

With influenza and pneumonia being so prominent, people were being prematurely buried and there were—few instances where it was discovered that people had been buried alive. Unfortunately, there could be more instances of this that remain undetected until today.

In Cape Town, South Africa, Kate Le Roux witnessed a wagon loaded with coffins pull away from her friend's house. As she watched, the truck bumped over a pothole, and the top-most coffin smashed to the ground, violently releasing its contents. To Kate's horror, the 'corpse' screamed and then scrambled shakily to his hands and knees. In New Mexico, Frank Garundo begged an undertaker to keep his wife Clara's grave open in order that two of his three children, expected to die before the day was over, might be buried with their mother. When baby Helen died, Frank shakily rose from his own sick bed and made the journey to the cemetery. Once there, the grief-stricken man asked that his wife's coffin be opened so that he might take one last look. To his horror, his wife was lying face downwards, with her long black braids twisted in her fingers – testimony to her agony as she tried to escape burial alive.¹⁹

One can imagine people suffocating from fluid during pneumonia. What were the measures that medical professionals took to determine if someone was still alive? How could people mistake someone who is alive for someone who is dead? If one checks a person's pulse, one would know if the person was alive. However, during a time of

¹⁹ Kirsty Duncan, "The Spanish Influenza of 1918," essay, in *Hunting the 1918 Flu One Scientist's Search for a Killer Virus* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 6–22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/9781442688278.7>.

extensive precautions, if people checking pulses were wearing gloves, one could see how a grave error could be made. Unfortunately, being buried alive happened on more than one occasion. The two instances from the above examples show one who remained alive and another who did not survive. Perhaps the one who was placed in a coffin was one of the individuals found lying in the street who was not examined to see if they were alive. If the ones who were picking up the bodies were not coroners, they would not have considered proper examinations or perhaps the numbers of people lying dead was so great, there was an assumption being made. This could explain why it was assumed that he or she was dead.

In May 1919, a few churches held revivals and people came to the church. The revival at Bradford, Pennsylvania resulted in nearly a hundred new converts to Christianity. Between the preached word, music and fellowship, churches grew in their membership.²⁰ Human interaction is needed. People attended the revivals in different locations but people must also be passionate about what is happening in their church; the mission must be greater than acquiring new members, it should be about sharing the gospel message because it's the gospel that saves souls.²¹ When the church loses sight of the purpose of its existence or fails to keep Christ as the center, no solid foundation exists. What is used to draw people, must continually be used to draw people. If the church uses gimmicks or other methods of expression that are inauthentic to the identity of the church, people who were drawn by other methods than Jesus Christ will not remain.

²⁰ Religious Telescope May 24, 1919 *The Religious Telescope*. (Dayton, OH. September 20, 1919), Vol. 85, No. 38. p 8-9.

²¹ Romans 1:16, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

Gathering for revivals in the middle of a pandemic proves to be unwise as well. When people become restless from being quarantined, they could develop cabin fever. Some of the signs of this are boredom, irritability, restlessness, impatience, anxiety, lack of motivation, loneliness, hopelessness, and depression.²² Staying indoors constantly is detrimental to one's mental health and isolation for extended periods of time can lead to permanent mental health disorders. If the entire world is confined to their homes, eventually they would rebel because of anxiety or depression. People dismissed the peril and ignored the risk of gathering in great numbers. Dangers became less important and even wearing masks were being argued about. Even though it reduced the chance of contracting or transmitting the disease, people were sick and tired of wearing masks. Perhaps it was a reminder that things were not yet safe. Perhaps it restricted the ability to breathe or it's strictly psychological and nothing really is wrong.

Hospitals were filled beyond capacity and the number of instances continued to climb. Any spaces that were not utilized were needed to house the patients. Thousands of people fell ill with influenza. Gyms, chapels, canteens and jails were repurposed as hospitals.²³ Cases were rising quickly and a surge of infections spread rapidly. In an emergency, the world needed to improvise insofar as where people would be housed. As the world has recently experienced a pandemic, many local clinics were repurposed. In New York City, the Jacob Javits Center was used for patients. One could argue the pandemic was an exaggeration; however, when one sees the number of people affected

²² "Cabin Fever: Definition, Symptoms, and How to Cope." *Medical News Today*. MediLexicon International, May 12, 2020. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/cabin-fever#signs>.

²³ Kirsty Duncan, "The Spanish Influenza of 1918," essay, in *Hunting the 1918 Flu One Scientist's Search for a Killer Virus* (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 6–22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/9781442688278.7>.

globally from approximately 50-100 million people²⁴ who were infected, one understands why it was referred to as one of the worst pandemics in history. Preventative methods needed to be taken so there was less of a fatal outcome for those who contracted the disease. Being housed as if one were in a hospice became the pessimistic expectancy for those who contracted the disease. Ironically, younger people who were perfectly healthy were the majority of the ones who died.

There was a second wave of the Spanish flu in September 1918 and in October, 195,000 Americans died, but public school enrollment increased.²⁵ Department of Health Bureau of Child Hygiene Dr. S Josephine Baker encouraged Dr. Copeland to keep schools open, believing they were better off contained there. They could keep healthy kids safe and distinguish the sick students. Contradictory as it seems, some children were safer at home; however, there were some children who resided in substandard conditions. New York City had approximately one million children and about seventy-five percent of those children lived in tenement homes that were unsanitary.²⁶ Many parallels to this era exist with the current where many were affected by quarantine. A pandemic is something that happened before and it was caused by a virus that was similar to the Sars Coronavirus. The world needed to cease what they were accustomed to reducing the spread of the virus. Many were unprepared for a virus to spread so rapidly and for it to

²⁴ Spinney, Laura. “*Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World*,” by Laura Spinney.” *Baylor University Medical Center Proceedings* 31, no. 2 (March 20, 2018): 254–254.

²⁵ Sarah Pruitt, “At Height of the 1918 Pandemic, NYC and Chicago Schools Stayed Open. Here's Why,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, August 5, 2020), <https://www.history.com/.amp/news/spanish-flu-schools-new-york-chicago>.

²⁶ Sarah Pruitt, “At Height of the 1918 Pandemic, NYC and Chicago Schools Stayed Open. Here's Why,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, August 5, 2020), <https://www.history.com/.amp/news/spanish-flu-schools-new-york-chicago>.

cause tremendous losses of lives in a relatively short time. Children returned to school during the Spanish flu pandemic in New York City as well as schools in Chicago.

Public schools in New York and Chicago were not closed.²⁷ Children who resided in unsanitary public housing were at a greater risk for infection at home than they were at school. Medical examinations were done upon entry to schools. If a child were sick, the child could not stay in school and only the healthy ones remained. Perhaps this was the best solution for children in substandard living quarters. Once regular testing reduced the risk of exposure, the school inevitably became a haven for the children attending. If regular testing were not administrated, it would be an increased risk for the students, instead, so school became a sterile environment protecting them from contracting influenza.

Tragically, the perilous influenza pandemic claimed over fifty million lives in a short period of time.²⁸ The influenza virus was never eliminated, it is just constantly evolving. Analyzing the impact of the pandemic and its residual effects informs us that a virus never ceases; however, the fatalities affiliated with it do. A vaccine is a sample of a dead or weakened form of a disease injected into your veins so that your red blood cells will learn how to fight the disease.²⁹ For this reason, a child is required to receive several vaccines prior to entering elementary school. With a virus being so widespread, one could understand how training immune systems to resist it is critical. If everyone receives

²⁷ Sarah Pruitt, "At Height of the 1918 Pandemic, NYC and Chicago Schools Stayed Open. Here's Why," *History.Com*, August 5, 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/spanish-flu-schools-new-york-chicago>.

²⁸ Marta Gritti, "Stories of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic and Its Legacy," *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 20, no. 1 (January 2020): 36, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1473-3099\(19\)30710-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1473-3099(19)30710-8).

²⁹ "Vaccines and Immunization: What Is Vaccination?," *World Health Organization*, August 30, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/vaccines-and-immunization-what-is-vaccination>.

the vaccine, and one contracts the disease, his or her body is prepared to combat it, resulting in less fatalistic encounters. The notion is to have more survivors when a virus spreads, especially if some carry the virus and are asymptomatic. Even if anyone does contract influenza, it minimizes the possibility of dying from it.

Red Bird Missionary Conference

The Red Bird Missionary Conference was a home-based mission based out of the United Methodist Church named after the area that it served. In the 1920s, the Red Bird Mission worked through local churches and experienced exponential growth in a short period of time. They helped build church edifices, provided meals, cared for the sick, and taught Sunday Schools.³⁰ The mission addressed the concerns and well-being of the people. When the mission saw an increasing problem, they held town meetings to address them. For example, the mission addressed the dangerously aggressive behavior of the people who were getting drunk in the community. Increased safety piqued the interest of those who lived in the area and increased attendance at the church. When they held services and revivals, the Holy Spirit poured out and many who were present converted. An essential function of the church is to be an ambassador for Christ. Periodically, touch base with the community. There is a purpose for a church being in the community. People are drawn by a need being met or by witnessing vibrancy in a church. Spiritual

³⁰ Schaeffer, Roberta. *The Story of Red Bird Mission: A History of Missions in Appalachia*, United Methodist Church. (Place of publication not identified: Red Bird Mission, Inc. of United Methodist Church, 1980), p 7-9.

hunger exists in each community and when people are getting fed well, others share the good news. which intrigues the listener, creating a desire to see what is happening as well. Even after a pandemic has acclimated people to their homes, some will seek a church where the presence of the Holy Spirit is evident. Thus, people evidently returned to the church after quarantine.

All of us have recently been impacted by a global pandemic. We were all quarantined for months, most jobs have been remote for over a year and many of us have been further linked via social media. Children entering kindergarten had their first year of school online and seniors in high school were not allowed to have their prom or graduation ceremonies. Churches were no longer gathering and the momentum that some churches had dwindled. Many became accustomed to working from home and churches had to invest in digital media to keep services going and to keep the saints engaged. Pastors were preaching to empty pews and many churches began social media accounts on Facebook and YouTube to stream their services. Sunday school and midweek bible studies were being held via zoom. Electronic giving became more prominent as people use services like Simple Give and Givelify to allow the tithes to continue.

Many ministries held in-person could no longer meet physically. People became fatigued from being on a screen for school, being on a screen at work and being on a screen for church. Some became accustomed to no longer attending church at all while some have become comfortable attending church from home. This is the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. How did the world rebuild after a pandemic that caused a greater severance than this one? Video calls, social media, live streams, personal computers, and television did not exist. After the end of this pandemic, what made the people return to

the church? Today, there are people who attend weekly services, while some have never entered the edifice. Some desire to get things back to the way they once were but some services such as Sunday School have become strictly virtual and will not be in-person any longer.

Interestingly, the youth I work with prefer to meet in person as they love being in the presence of one another and they encourage and uplift one another. Almost every church today operates as a church plant and people are starting over. Discovering the historical context of all churches that experienced explosive growth while addressing the concerns of the people in the neighborhood benefits us. It would benefit us to have town meetings so we can get to know our neighbors and how we can best serve our community. Learning what causes others to seek the gospel in a world that relies on Google for information can help us operate with love and compassion in spirit and in truth.

Christians were not meant to be insular. We must reach the city for Jesus Christ and serve our communities. Even though the pandemic has caused some traumatic mental impact, there was a turning point when people returned to the church after 1918 flu pandemic or Great Influenza epidemic. As we reevaluate our programs, we must decide what we must stop, start, and continue. Who is in our congregation now? Are they mostly the same people or are there many new people who have joined us? We must reevaluate and reassess the community where the church is located to properly address the needs of those who reside in the neighborhood while still meeting the needs of those who currently attend or are serviced by the church. How do we most effectively minister to the people we are attracting? What is the age group? Has the dynamic changed? Assessment needs to be done in order to live out the gospel in a dying world. The church is not going to be

the same as it was prior to the pandemic and part of the congregation will be digital disciples. If your church does not have a live stream, you are missing a great portion of people. Some people are required to work on Sundays and they watch the recording later.

Seeing the tragic impact of the Influenza of 1918 and knowing the world resumed beyond that pandemic proves that the world will continue in the aftermath of this global pandemic. We are currently witnessing the recommencement of the world, so there is hope for the church of Jesus Christ to not only resume but to thrive. People resumed visiting beaches, traveling and gathering in large numbers as the pandemic came to an official close as a global emergency according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention on May 8, 2023. Now, we will start to see a new trend. The church will have some people who will not return to in-person worship, some who remain hybrid where they will alternate Sundays they attend in person with virtual attendance and others who will attend only in person. What we look to resolve is keeping all three groups equally engaged as some edifices, and mega-churches once filled with parishioners have not quite reached pre-pandemic levels yet. The new digital discipleship must become more engaging to ensure that those who live out of state or even out of the country receive equal pastoral care despite not being near the location of the church.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The church needs to become aware of how to identify those who have been mishandled and the impact that being mishandled has on someone else. Many come into the church with their issues, but we can be a place where they come to speak about their issues. We can share Biblical wisdom in conjunction with working with mental health professionals to help youth find a place of healing. Although the youth ministry is not a place to provide professional therapy, it can be where there is equality among the youth.

1 Peter 2:9 declares we are a chosen people, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. When we observe what happened with Mephibosheth, he was a person of royal descent, and circumstances took him from his rightful place as an heir to the throne. In the Baptist church, we believe in the priesthood of all believers. Those who have been mishandled are not to be ignored by us as the church. David gave us an example of how we should seek to restore lost people. When we read the story of Mephibosheth, his ailment was not healed, but he recovered his place in the kingdom.

Part of the church's DNA is restoring those whose life circumstances have impacted. We can give them a place to have their voices heard. God cares about their concerns, and we are to create a space for people to no longer be silenced but to discover their identity in Christ. Merib-baal was renamed Mephibosheth along the journey because

God allowed him to be stripped of the idolatrous background he was born into. Like many others in the Bible, people must know their “new name.” Jacob became Israel, Sarai became Sarah, and Simon became Peter. Each person with a change in direction and serving in their purpose.

Any malice they have endured, whether it be from their peers or from at home, God cares about them as they are. The church should be a place to embrace youth with love and to be a haven for those to express themselves. Fellowship should be encouraged among the youth, teaching them to disciple and learn how to support them. When one learns who they are in Christ, one must work through the trauma to begin healing. The church can affirm who they are in Christ, while a professional can help them work through the pain of the trauma.

We often refer to the church as a place with imperfect people. Laying on of hands, praying, bringing in licensed professionals, group sessions, reassurance, and giving a place at the table of honor help discover true identity in Christ. Affirmations may need to be customized for everyone who must be reminded of their value and identity in Christ.

Being mishandled can cause one to lose their voice. It can cause you to be insecure and deal with a lot of pain, and being mishandled gives you shallow connections with people. Often, you connect with people and find common ground by sharing a sport, a religion, or a hobby. When one has been mocked, abused, or rejected by one’s peers or fears being mocked by one’s peers, one learns to dim one’s light so that one will not be alone. It is difficult to go out among the world as a young person and be mocked for being different. The world does not accept any Biblical standards except love, and that love does not always translate to loving God. They mean to love people.

The church is to love and create an atmosphere where youth feel comfortable to be their true selves. Where they can grow in their faith and passion with one another. The church is to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. To do that, we must work towards healing the broken. We must develop leaders to support those who have experienced trauma.

The story of Mephibosheth demonstrated how God can use a man after his own heart to care for the legacy of those who were chosen. The church should be a haven for those who have experienced abuse. People who have been hurt should be able to find a form of solace and a place to feel like they belong.

Practical Theology

Youth experience environments that contradict the environment they experience in church. The inconsistency can cause them to learn to operate differently in a different environment. Some adapt their behavior among their peers to avoid making their friends uncomfortable. Dimming their light does not bring glory to God; they are meant to shine, and the good they do is meant to glorify God in heaven.¹ God cares about those who have experienced trauma and wants them to know that God is always there. Those who have been victims of someone else's sinful actions have been impacted so greatly that one would need to explore more than forgiveness to heal from the wounds of trauma.

Much like David, we must help the children of God who have been mistreated be restored to a place of honor. 2 Peter 1:9 declares you are a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. This calls for us to seek out the people

¹ Matthew 5:14-16 *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1754-1755.

of God in the community and help them see their value. In a world that devalues people or classifies them by racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and the like, we have to help those who have been told they are worthless, those whom their peers have rejected, those who endured abuse or have been removed from their royal legacy see themselves as God sees them. We have to let them know that they are children of the most high God and are loved and cared for; not everyone will believe they are valuable. There will be some who are jealous; there will be some who will be uncomfortable because their presence challenges others who would prefer to stay in the dark. There will be times of loneliness, there will be times of temptation, but they will make it through. They are never alone. They need a community, a kingdom where they can express their love for God and be affirmed in their identity.

The church is referred to as a hospital for those who are sick. We do not remain sick, but we support each other as we work through the sickness. As the church, we can talk about the issues of sin and teach about forgiveness. We can support those who have been harmed. We encourage those who have been victims in their relationship with God. Ultimately, God is the one who truly can heal. The church is a community of hope that illuminates the membership. Individuals are part of a larger whole, and each part is important for the whole body to function as an interdependent whole².

The youth ministry should seek to show the kindness of God to all youth who come. One key element in our faith is community. We were never meant to be alone. Even if we are alone for a season, we still need to have relationships to build and grow

² Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 498-500.

with.³ People want a place where they feel like they belong and feel safe to be themselves. Historically, especially among people of color, the church was among the few places where the voices mattered. Living in a country where systemic oppression is the norm and societal pressures exist, especially for teenagers who do not want to be alone, causes compromise at some point. Most likely, the one with a negative character will corrupt the positive.⁴ One must be given a chance to fellowship with one another.

Fellowship is needed to grow in relationship with one another. Youth must build a bond with one another by doing activities that they enjoy, such as playing trivia games. Once the bond is built, youth begin to open authentically. In an age where individuality is encouraged, we offer community for people. We are to love God first and then each other. Many youths are a product of their environment, so, as the church, we can provide a place conducive to spiritual growth. The church can demonstrate ways to have fun and develop holistically. When people have each other to lean on, they can encourage each other in the weariest moment and share their burdens.

Ministry also needs to be borne from the word. Bible Study⁵ is a vital component of the church. Bible study must be done within the community, and individual Bible study must be encouraged. Ministry cannot exist apart from the lordship of Jesus Christ and the word of God. Anything that is not rooted in scripture could be subject to change. When we reflect on Christ's ministry, spending time with the ostracized, healing the sick,

³ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 275.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:33 *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

⁵ 2 Timothy 2:15 *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2139.

and raising the dead, we will be as welcoming as Christ. The Bible gives a great account of the work of the triune God throughout the Bible, and we miss an integral part of our work if we fail to incorporate the sacred text, which is considered authoritative.

Being open to adapting to the people coming into the fold is important. Periodic assessments will help us to evaluate where we are as a church. We would have a praxis to continuously evaluate how well we are at life-giving in our context.⁶ A healthy church grows spiritually, and how it grows determines how we need to adapt. When dealing with people who have had various degrees of trauma, we must have information available for the resources for people to receive help readily available. If the collective trauma is great, we may need to consider having a licensed professional come in to assist the community of believers.

Process Theology

“In process theology, everything that happens—what is possible and what we do with our experience, is a product of the past. Whether you are a quark, an amoeba, or a person, you continually sort through these three inputs: what you inherit from the world, what’s possible in your context, and what you do about it.”⁷ One who has experienced trauma impacts how they perceive the world, themselves, and themselves in the world. The world is filtered through their life experiences and can hinder how they see God. Although God does not condone abuse, God allowed it to happen. Although God was

⁶ Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 47.

⁷ Monica A. Coleman, “Process Theology,” ed. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2008), 709.

there, God did not stop it from happening. This can cause a distrust in how one views relationships in one's life. If one experiences emotional abuse or absence from one's father, to refer to God as Father leaves one with a poor point of reference or no point of reference at all. If one experiences neglect or abandonment, the moment God is silent, the pain they may harbor may increase, and one may become upset with God. If one experiences abuse, one may be afraid of God and slowly back away or try to be a perfectionist so one does not get into trouble.

If the youth have experienced a household that enforces what goes on in this house and stays in this house, it can impact how they see things. If one is raised with parents who attend church, yet the behavior is hypocritical, they learn it is okay to live as one pleases rather than to live a life pleasing to God. As the church, we are to be ambassadors for Christ all the time. If we relegate being Christian to the time we are spending in or among the church, then we are not showing the world who Christ is, and we grieve God. We must constantly be intentional about our relationship with God as part of our development. One can only teach the importance of consistency, but it is up to the individuals to submit to the changes of the Holy Spirit.

Understanding how one started or the history of a person can help us better understand how to support them and how to best provide individual care to each person we lead. God created God's children and knew them very well.⁸ God would want us to shepherd them with care, understanding, and encouraging them. One would have to know how they see themselves and how they came to that conclusion. One would have to teach

⁸ Jeremiah 1:5/ Ps 139:13 *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1054, 882.

what Scripture attests about who they are and how they are valuable. It is acceptable and encouraged to have boundaries for those who cause harm.

Once we understand what happened in the past, we must take the time to see how they got from that point and how it has impacted them from then until now. If someone has been the victim of trauma for years, one could be acting out with a tainted view of reality. The past can help us identify what triggers a person and how we can be more conscious of what could trigger the person in any way that could be detrimental. That person could be extremely defensive and mistrustful. We have to be patient and move at the pace the person is comfortable discipling them. As we reflect Christ, we should be willing to meet people where they are in their life's journey.

As a Christian organization, we must include prayer with and for the people impacted by trauma. Studies show that religious practices contribute to holistic wellness.⁹ The encouraging theme of praying and meditating on the Word of God seems to be a common thread among multiple theologians. An integral part of the process must be intercessory prayer because they have been associated with fewer side effects from various ailments and recovery times¹⁰. God is ever-present and is the source of healing and restoration. If we are to have a process for transformation, it must be initiated with prayer. We must not feel pressured to have all the answers and make the mistake of leaving God out of the process. Praying for a person may sustain them through their situation.

⁹ Bruce G. Epperly, "Process Theology and the Healing Adventure," in *Handbook of Process Theology* ed. Donna Bowman and Jay McDaniel (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 92.

¹⁰ Bruce G. Epperly, "Process Theology and the Healing Adventure," in *Handbook of Process Theology* ed. Donna Bowman and Jay McDaniel (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 92.

When someone has experienced abuse, it is not just a sin from the individual. It impacts the one who was sinned against. If getting help is not encouraged, it can spawn a cycle that will not cease until someone decides to stop the cycle of abuse. I believe that the point of harming someone grieves God, who intended for us to live in harmony with God and one another.¹¹ Part of the human experience is to sin against God and one another.

Covert Abuse

Abuse is a major cause of trauma, and some forms of abuse are more difficult to detect because it is covert, such as verbal or emotional abuse. The author argues being able to adapt is great; however, it is the reason we cannot name the experience as harmful. The abuse is minimized, denied, and ignored.¹² One of the most difficult aspects of emotional abuse is that it often becomes an unidentified harm because one has experienced this, and it has been relabeled as a form of discipline. One is taught not to speak ill of someone else. When one experiences subtle changes like being a confidant to a parent, the child is treated as an intimate partner rather than a child. In this case, it's emotional incest; the child has become a lover to the parent, and in more extreme cases, one will see boundary violations, enmeshed intimacy, and resentment from other family members.¹³ Since it is difficult to identify, one could have trouble explaining why they

¹¹ James Poling, *Rethinking Faith: A Constructive Practical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 29.

¹² David Allende, *Healing the Wounded Heart: The Heartache of Sexual Abuse and the Hope of Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 54.

¹³ David Allende, *Healing the Wounded Heart: The Heartache of Sexual Abuse and the Hope of Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 54-55.

experience certain feelings and reactions. If a form of abuse was dismissed when someone shared the incident, one is not taught to identify what was abuse. It becomes something that they live with and sometimes adopt as their behavior. One may not break free from the cycle unless it is called out.

When a child starts to feel responsibility for the well-being of a parent, it is a sign of emotional incest.¹⁴ The child is the confidant for the parent, sharing all the most intimate details of their life with things that a child cannot handle. The more mature conversations and the feelings that should be shared with a spouse are being shared with the child. These blurred lines cause the child to carry a burden they should not be responsible for. A child's privilege can cause them to be used by others in the family to get what they want from the parent. However, triangulations cause the child to be caught between that parent and the other parent or the siblings. Whenever someone wants something, or the family wants something, they send in the one who is favored to do it. It becomes the burden of the child to ask for things others want rather than asking the parent directly.

Impact of Pain

When one has been sinned against, it has unusually impacted the person. The Asian concept of han best explains those who have been abused. The concept of Han is those who have received the impact of someone else's sin, the wound resulting in one's soul being mistreated. When one has been harmed verbally, emotionally, or physically, it causes pain that rarely gets addressed with more than an apology. In cases of abuse,

¹⁴ David Allende *Healing the Wounded Heart: The Heartache of Sexual Abuse and the Hope of Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 55.

especially emotional abuse, one rarely receives an apology, much less validation or restitution. Han is when the innocent is caught in the suffering of the wicked. As a result of this, many feel rage and seek revenge.¹⁵

Han is also the result of oppression in situations where one is powerless, where the culprit is unknown, or one is unable to retaliate. The frustrated hope and resentful bitterness can cloud one's judgment.¹⁶ In many instances, one is encouraged to divorce what one feels or to check one's emotions at the door when entering a different venue. One is told they can pick the emotions back up once they leave; one does not always do so. When left untended, they are subject to infection, making the initial wound worse than if it were tended to properly. When someone experiences trauma, it is similar to a deep cut in the flesh. When it is deep, you cannot leave it untreated; it will need stitches to ensure that the cut heals properly. If there is an emotional wound, the church may address the spiritual implications that come with the wound; however, it must also have a list of referrals to address the issues that can assist the individual's holistic healing.

Han is void in the soul of a victim¹⁷. Sin causes damage to the relationship the individuals have with one another and with God. In some instances, when someone harms another person, the one who was harmed is hurt and sometimes angry with the one who hurt them and with God. The void will not heal on its own. The person will need to be actively invested in healing. When you have a void, the emotions that come with the

¹⁵ Andrew Sung Park, and Susan L. Nelson. *The Other Side of Sin: Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned-Against* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), 15-20.

¹⁶ Andrew Sung Park, and Susan L. Nelson. *The Other Side of Sin: Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned-Against* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), 15-20.

¹⁷ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993) 24.

issue that caused the void can fill what was once whole. One must intentionally address the cause of the hurt and not attempt to suppress the emotion accompanying the injury. One must be able to be honest about the event that happened and not try to force oneself to expedite the process. If one had a broken arm, one would have to go to the hospital, make sure the injury gets treated, and wear a cast. This would set the arm in place so the bone would heal correctly and be restored. Similarly, one would need to address the issue so that the healing could occur correctly.

When someone is wronged, we are told to forgive, but forgiveness is twofold: it is mental and emotional. Mentally, we could have moved past an issue, yet we are wounded emotionally. When someone has experienced trauma, one will need time to work through all their issues. Emotional scars cannot heal expeditiously; they must be worked through over time. God deeply loves God's children and does not desire for them to remain injured but desires for the soul to be restored.¹⁸ "God desires an increase in harmony and beauty through greater love and power. But tragedy based on accumulated human decisions for evil frustrates the intentions of God."¹⁹ Sin is an inevitable part of the human condition, and regrettably, the impact of sinning against God and another person causes harm one can only acknowledge and ask forgiveness for. Some must learn to move forward whether forgiveness was asked for or not.

Working with youth requires us to set up a system of support. We must evaluate our methods of providing them with care. Each person who has experienced trauma will require something different. We must have a few approaches that are determined by the

¹⁸ Isaiah 61:7-8 *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

¹⁹ James Poling, *Rethinking Faith: A Constructive Practical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 29.

individual need. The only support one may need is someone to listen to them. We can listen to one who has experienced trauma without giving any advice. We can offer the ministry of presence and be active listeners. We are not at liberty to advise, but as the church, we represent God to other people. Although we are the priesthood of believers, we must not feel obligated to have all the answers. We support the person but leave room for the Holy Spirit to minister in ways we cannot.

Transformational Theology

Transformation begins when one is willing to submit to Christ. Christ was the model of transformation.²⁰ If we want to change, some things must be released to be handled by the Holy Spirit. The transformation will not commence without an honest assessment of where one is in their walk with Christ. When you think about the story of David's call to the ministry, he was the only one of the sons that Jesse did not call, and even Samuel was not sure, but it was because God knows where a person's heart is. One may falsely believe one is fine if one does not have a deep introspection²¹. But once someone truly looks inward and sees the pain that could be clouding their vision, one could mistakenly assess all is well when, in fact, their true relationship with God is superficial. The evidence of the process of change would be the spiritual fruit one possesses or the lack thereof.

²⁰ Oliver Davies, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2013), 69.

²¹ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 9.

Some believe that shutting out emotions is a great virtue.²² When one experiences traumatic events, one desires to escape the pain affiliated with the trauma. If untreated, one experiences the pain, and some around that person believe there is a point where one should get over it. In an attempt to expedite the process or be able to manage better, one may learn to shut down emotions to complete the task one needs to complete. This may seem like the perfect ideal situation. However, nothing is being addressed, just suppressed; one should not deny anger, ignore pain, avoid doubts, or bypass depression²³. All these emotions that accompany trauma need to be worked out. One must learn to be honest about what one feels and be willing to accept emotions when they arise. In some cases, the person may not have been allowed to express his or her feelings, hindering them from experiencing intimacy in other relationships. In some instances, some are angry with God because God did not stop the harm from happening, and others are angry with God but do not believe they can be angry with God, so they will deny their anger because it is not allowed.²⁴ The perception of how they saw God had changed because it was now understood that God was not to blame for the activity.

²² Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 9.

²³ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 9.

²⁴ Susan Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God: The Authentic Spirituality of the Annihilated Soul* (London, UK: Routledge, 2012), 57-58.

Awareness

No changes can be made without awareness of the issue. Most do not acknowledge the pain or deny the pain until they can no longer bear it.²⁵ When someone has an issue, even the closest friends can listen for a while; however, they will either cease communicating or tell them they are dwelling on a topic too long while advising the person to focus on something else. People cease to talk about their issues because they feel like a burden to those with whom they share their troubles. If one feels invalidated in the prolonged period of pain, one may believe they are taking too long to recover and suppress the emotions. The pain can be ignored for a while, but eventually, it will surface in some form, eating disorders, anger, aggravation, projection, or depression, and one may isolate oneself. Dealing with some issues in the short run can help avoid long-term issues.

Trauma must be addressed in some manner, so people learn how to better work through their pain. One cannot simply overcome the pain of abuse. Trauma unaddressed will impact how one works, and when inundated with past pain, it can hinder a person to the point of an emotional or mental breakdown. Once the emotion behind the issue is acknowledged, one must understand the pain's root. Understanding the pain from the affliction assists in alleviating the residual feeling.²⁶ As a person does introspection, they will learn who they are and what prompts their daily decisions. This lifelong journey of self-discovery is imperative to understanding who you are in Christ.

²⁵ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993) 138.

²⁶ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993) 138-139.

Part of the honest perspective is about being with God when spending quality time with God. We need to spend quality time with God and not just do for God. Often, we are identified or given value in what we do to the extent that we lose ourselves by conforming to the job we work or attempting to adopt all principles with the family's faith tradition. Our identity is not found in the doctrine by the job worked or the clothing worn but in Christ. However, God does not want us to become conformers or to disregard who we are. God wants us to develop authentic relationships with him as we are. This would simply include quality time with God, whether in prayer, reading the sacred text (the Bible), or time in silent reflection.

As someone is coming from an abusive situation, the victim must be willing to embark on a journey to heal. Once the person realizes how painful the situation is, they must have a desire to get out of it. It does come to begin with accepting the fact that abuse has harmed us and it affects us presently.²⁷ What one has experienced will impact how one interacts with and perceives the world. The origins of these painful experiences must be dealt with for one to move forward. Transformation requires submission to and participation in the process. Since there is no universal fix or linear path of healing, everyone's path will look different as they journey to healing. If one is accustomed to fending oneself or is exposed to emotional abuse, the transformation will require support that will help them with their trust issues. Just as God is patient, we must be patient with their transformation.

Part of the process of transformation is getting to the point where they just excuse the one who caused the abuse, especially if it is in the family. People are often taught

²⁷ Dan B. Allende, *Healing the Wounded Heart: The Heartache of Sexual Abuse and the Hope of Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 131.

what happens in the house, stay in the house, and are made to feel awful if they share what happens with anyone else. One has to learn to recover one's voice to share with others and run the risk of backlash from those who have committed harm against them. This transition may be difficult because they could be ostracized from their family temporarily or indefinitely. God would want us to encourage people embarking on the tumultuous journey toward recovery. We must be willing to listen and validate what they are sharing to give them support. If someone experiences abandonment, neglect, or ostracization, the church must be reassuring, consistent, and kind when offering support to those who are healing.

Church is the life-giving community we desire and need to nourish and teach us. The church is in a position to teach the spiritual values that would encourage the people²⁸. Everyone needs to feel loved and safe. The church should be the haven where people can be honest and caring. When people face a grim, painful reality in their homes, they need a place that is the antithesis of the chaos in their homes. People need a place to feel they can trust you, and it may take time and several reassurances before they feel comfortable enough to open up. The church is the beacon of light in a murky world that can give hope in a dark situation. We can offer the genuine fellowship and kindness they need to experience. The church is in the world, yet none of it is what people need to know. The church is the ambassador of Jesus Christ, and the unconditional love of God that we exhibit should help others be carried through each week. We should accept who people

²⁸ Kim, Grace Ji-Sun, and Hill, Graham. *Healing Our Broken Humanity: Practices for Revitalizing the Church and Renewing the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 165.

are and walk with them as they heal. Church is a community of believers called by the Holy Spirit to a change of life in Christ to demonstrate loving, compassionate gestures.²⁹

Willing Participation

Once the problem is clear and acknowledged, one must be willing to participate in their healing journey. If a person remains in denial or does not want to work through the issues, one will not be able to be healed. If one remains afraid of the unknown, indifferent, or has no hope for healing, one may be apprehensive about trusting the process. If one is unwilling to invest in methods that will help one manage the issues, one will remain in pain or possibly become worse over time. One must treat the counseling like medication; you attend as often as the doctor recommends. The person must be open and ready to delve into the healing process. Before beginning, one must be determined not to stop regardless of the scope of the work needed or the time, so a commitment is made, whether for a season or an indefinite period.

Once the process has begun, it may not be an easy road, and a person may relive some of the painful moments and no longer want to continue. The person may also think they are better prematurely and cease too soon. In this instance, the church can still encourage their spiritual growth through discipleship while encouraging the individual to remain in a therapeutic setting. We can be the faith community to encourage them and be supportive when able. However, we must be clear on our assignment to pray for the individual as they obtain help. The road to recovery will not be easy, especially if it has been unaddressed for years. Throughout the progression, that person must be willing to

²⁹ Oliver Davies, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2013), 142.

submit to the restoration process. If a person abandons them too soon, that person could relapse, and the relapse could leave them in a worse condition than they were in before beginning. Until the root cause is addressed, the person must remain consistent with their development.

We must also remind the council if there is a case of mental illness involved, our expectation of what progress looks like may be adjusted. The person may not receive total healing and be free from battles with depression or anxiety; those may be lasting. However, when coupling a mental health professional with the church, one can find stability and function healthily.

Conclusion

The church will affirm the identity of the person who was impacted by trauma according to Biblical standards as a part of the discipleship. The church will encourage prayer, and the leadership will be intercessors for all the youth, regardless of their trauma. Once educated, the council can identify if something more is needed, such as a professional counselor, and make recommendations to the youth and the parents to follow up.

Each theologian has provided a perspective on the theology. When it comes to practical theology, more specifically, how ecclesiology forms practical and transformational theology, we can include it as part of the aesthetic to help support people as they work through their wounds. Church addresses the spiritual component while encouraging licensed professionals to work through the emotional damage they

have encountered. We can recommend that a person seek help where needed so the person can be supported.

Once the issue is identified, we can speak to the youth about true forgiveness and reassure them it will take time. We must also be mindful of the impact of the person's experiences. Each instance in each individual may be different, but we must be patient and mindful. Overall, it is important to support the person lovingly. When someone has already endured harm, one needs to know they are among others they can trust. If there is no confidence among them, they will not be open to receiving from the ones surrounding them.

One must be willing to submit to the process needed for their healing. If one is open to restoration in the church and learning who they are in Christ, it can affirm who they are en route to becoming. One is given principles on forgiveness and taking the time to understand the impacts of harm. Being patient with the process and taking the time to understand the residual effects of the trauma will help a person understand why they do what they do and what triggers them to react to things in the manner they do. The person would not be instructed to reconcile with those causing the trauma, but one would learn what being a part of the royal priesthood entails.

Being a disciple of Christ comes with a community. One does not work in a vacuum or silo but is an integral part of having the body of Christ functioning. The community or the church supports one on one's journey to wholeness. One does not have to be on the journey alone but must be covered with other people's physical presence and prayers. Everyone needs to have people in their life who love them. With love from the church, a person will be encouraged and uplifted in the difficult journey.

People who have been victims of trauma can be restored and transformed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Just like Jesus asked the man who had been sick, “Wilt thou be made whole?³⁰” We must ask that question to those who are victims of trauma. When they are willing to participate in their healing, they can manage the symptoms of the pain they carry. God will meet those who are struggling to forgive and help them. In most instances, God will help them navigate life's vicissitudes better, and in some cases, God will heal them.

³⁰ John 5:6 *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1916.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Leading youth who have been mishandled means dealing with youth who have been harmed. In some cases, this harm is not intentional. Sometimes trauma, more specifically abuse, happens because it was labeled as “discipline” by their parent. When someone believes they are doing what is best for the child, they may take action with the intention of helping without knowing the long-term effects of such behavior. Damage can be avoided by taking the time to understand and taking heed of one’s words and actions or lack thereof. What one does or says can impact the mind and cause injury.

Psychology’s tools can help us delve into what makes events traumatic and how the trajectory of the mind can be altered by abuse.

Understanding what constitutes abuse, whether by a peer or parent, is important. When someone says something harmful, even in a jocular fashion, it can be damaging. People are aware of the overt forms of abuse, such as physical or sexual abuse; there is visible evidence that the abuse has occurred. However, some forms of abuse are not as evident even though they cause just as much damage. Verbal and emotional abuse can cause one to react in a harmful manner. What is constituted as “trauma”, will vary, so the church must be careful not to cause harm to those who are under their care.

When some people experience traumatic events, they withdraw and avoid talking about what happened. However, not every horrible event is considered traumatic by everyone. Understanding how an event is coded as trauma helps the community of faith learn how to avoid causing trauma to others or being a cause of reinjury. When communities of faith are not careful in their process of assimilation into the congregation, they can become more harmful than helpful in their approach to discipleship. The church must be intentional in providing care and support for its community.

People who have endured emotional or verbal abuse will require support if they decide to embark on a journey to heal. There may be moments when they may want to give up, so they will need people to walk alongside them and not just their counselor or therapist. Some in the church are not aware of the abuse they have endured. If trauma is afflicting the people of God, it will hinder them from moving forward. It needs to be addressed for them to be open to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. The interdisciplinary focus of psychology will help understand how the impacts on the mind will provide better care for those who have been harmed by abuse.

Shaping Research in the Project

Psychological principles will assist in developing a framework for this project. If we are to develop leaders who can identify and assist traumatized youth, we must develop our understanding of the impacts of trauma on the mind. When we encounter youth, we should know what the forms of abuse look like and how such abuse impacts

the lives of those harmed. This information will guide how we may best support them. Hopefully, such leaders will be enthusiastic about what they learn.

The story of Mephibosheth demonstrates trauma can have a lasting impact which can cripple someone indefinitely. Caregivers are responsible for developing youth to protect and provide care for the youth. Although we know God can heal wounds, not all wounds will heal in the way we might assume. Those lifelong impacts will inform how we view the world and how easily or hesitantly we develop relationships. One accident can change the trajectory of someone's life. Even though the accident may have crippled him and he lost his inheritance as well as social standing, like David, we can affirm their identity in Christ and encourage and support them as they find their way through the troubles they experience. We, the church, are the kingdom of God and are able to give them a place of honor as children of God.

During the Great Influenza pandemic, people were restricted to their homes but eventually returned to the church edifice. With all the separation and isolation needed to reduce the spread of the H1N1 influenza (the "Spanish flu"), when people became weary of the isolation and wearing masks. One can liken the experience to a house arrest. Although it needed to happen, people had their entire lives disrupted and were not gathering in mass numbers. Their frustration escalated, and people longed for things to return to normal. People experienced the trauma of having their entire life disrupted, causing grief.

Black churches specifically were a hub of the community. It was a place of equality where people were not subject to the racism of the time and where a social group that is often like a family comes together and supports one another as they develop

spiritually. When people lose that support, they may not realize its impact until it is too late. People need God and each other for love and support. During a time when technology was telephones and radios, people managed to be informed, but they were still not allowed to visit one another. In all cases, we need support from one another. After the flu had passed, people returned to their normal tasks, and the churches were repopulated.

God comforts those who have endured trauma, even if the trauma began with previous generations. Trauma is not solely something that impacts someone physically; it also impacts them emotionally and mentally. Each of us is impacted individually, but it affects us corporately. If there are no measures taken to work through the trauma, can be dangerous to those who have experienced it as well as to those with whom they interact.

Trauma and Psychology

Experiencing abuse, it impacts ones development. Spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting/ corrupting, denying emotional responsiveness, and neglecting the child's needs are all types of maltreatment¹. When control becomes the central focus in a relationship, whether by parents or among peers, a person may be subject to harm. One may think that threats and fearmongering are great ways to avoid physical discipline, but those actions are still abuse. The abuse damages the one receiving it and can be misinterpreted by the one using it. If a parent or caregiver finds out that threatening harm

¹ Amy J.L. Baker *Bonded to the Abuser: How Victims Make Sense of Childhood Abuse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2015), 71.

or kicking someone out makes them comply, they could misinterpret how it truly impacts the person being threatened.

Spurning is a belittling, degrading, and nonphysical form of hostile or rejecting behavior, such as shaming someone for showing emotions, singling out a child for less rewards or greater punishment, and public humiliation.² Terrorizing is placing a child in unpredictable or chaotic circumstances, or recognizably dangerous situations, setting a rigid or unrealistic expectation with the threat of loss, harm, or danger if they are not met, and threatening violence against the child, the child's loved one, or objects. Inciting fear and intimidation to coerce someone into obedience is also detrimental³. These actions may not be seen as harmful by someone who was raised using these methods. These coercive behaviors are damaging to the victims and cause anxiety and fear. The aftermath can cause the person to become distrustful by drawing conclusions based on the interactions in the past, confusing reality, and the harmful past.

Coercive relationships can cause long-term damage, such as low self-esteem, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior, physical injury, unwanted pregnancy, dropping out of school, hasty marriage, addictions, and legal and mental health problems.⁴ When someone has a relationship with conditions or with someone who reacts harmfully when they do not get their way, the relationship is unhealthy. The person may have learned this from their home whether it was done subtly or blatantly. Someone who endured this

² Amy J.L Baker *Bonded to the Abuser: How Victims Make Sense of Childhood Abuse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2015), 74-78.

³ Amy J.L Baker *Bonded to the Abuser: How Victims Make Sense of Childhood Abuse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2015), 79-83.

⁴ Lisa Fontes, *Invisible Chains: Overcoming Coercive Control in your Intimate Relationships* (New York, NY: Guilford Publications, 2015), 105.

toxicity, being controlled through insults and manipulation, they have been damaged, especially if they were young. Data show that emotional abuse can cause harm to the part of the brain that helps manage emotions and is self-aware⁵. If someone has damage to the brain from emotional abuse, they will have a difficult journey recovering because they have been impacted so intensely that they cannot process emotions in a healthy way. The pain caused by emotional abuse causes difficulty with empathy, emotional understanding, and epigenetics. Some instances of abuse involve damage that will not hinder the development of the person; however, that requires the person to be intentional about seeking help.

We can feel oppressed by others when we feel insignificant or value the opinions of others over our own thoughts. Often, this dynamic is maintained with microaggressions unknown to the victim, and they are being labeled as overly sensitive or crazy, leading to blaming themselves rather than the oppressor.⁶ The microaggressions experienced in a relationship can indicate how the person is. Gaslighting is the mind-manipulating strategy intended for another to believe that their perception of reality is mistaken and get the person to believe what the manipulator wants them to believe.⁷ When someone states something cruel, it must be addressed as soon as possible. According to David, “When one is denied an opportunity to confront the source of oppression, the anger is directed inwardly at those who remind the oppressed individual

⁵ Courtney Telloian, “Effects of Emotional Abuse on Your Brain, Relationships, and Health,” Psych Central, March 23, 2022, <https://psychcentral.com/health/effects-of-emotional-abuse#brain-impacts>.

⁶ E. J. R. David, *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2013), 5.

⁷ Fuchsman, Ken. "Gaslighting." *The Journal of Psychohistory* 47, no. 1 (Summer, 2019) 74.

of him- or herself.”⁸ The aftermath of microaggression can linger, should not be dismissed, and should be clarified as such. Many begin as victims of microaggressions that are not identified, so the person misinterprets them, such as by thinking they cannot “take a joke” when, in reality, the comment hurts. Confronting those who oppress others is liberating.

Wrestling with internalized oppression reinforced by abuse will affect self-esteem and can cause depression, emotional avoidance, and rumination.⁹ People can become trapped in a cycle because they have internalized the abuse and because it is normalized; some even seek it in their relationships. If someone is constantly criticized, they will do their best to appease the other to avoid being alone. If positive reinforcement is not made, that person will typically compromise at the risk of losing themselves. This teaches inferiority and, in the worst-case scenarios, self-loathing. When we are taught that how we think or act is unacceptable, we may begin to doubt ourselves and work to conform to what is accepted. The most difficult part is that we have internalized that we are wrong. Such internalized oppression stops people from seeking help¹⁰.

If someone is unaware of being abused, they will not know they need to seek help and may use the same tactics that were used on them, thinking that this is healthy behavior. They may become defensive in situations that are not harmful. They may be triggered by something, which can lead to feeling unsafe and having their boundaries

⁸ E. J. R. David, *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2013), 5.

⁹ E. J. R. David, *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2013), 18-20.

¹⁰ E. J. R. David, *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2013), 21.

violated. With fear involved, the response will be fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. However, everyone has a limit to what they can take until one either set limits, fight back, or break down. The goal is to cease any damage and not injure anyone again.

The message sent to the abused is often that they are not accepted for who I am, they are not safe, or they are not important.¹¹ The danger is ending up in a perpetual cycle of harm because that is the “normal” environment or exhibiting these behaviors and causing harm to someone else. When we have not received the desired approval, we may overcompensate and even try to figure out what pleases the parent or other abuser so we can hear they are proud of us. There becomes this dynamic of detachment as a defense against pain yet a longing to feel worthy¹². When one is not the recipient of words of affirmation, one may have difficulty receiving compliments and affirmations. One may not believe someone initially when they have something kind to say.

Sometimes, the person does not recognize the incidents as traumatic until after an enactment, which causes one to see it from another angle. When someone views the incident from a different perspective, they may notice in hindsight that they did not have as good an experience as they thought. They may be surprised to find out that all relationships are not like what they have witnessed or experienced at home. Some may have experienced spanking understanding it as discipline whereas others have never been spanked for doing something wrong. If these harmful behaviors are normalized in one’s mind, one will have to unlearn these behaviors or responses to stop them.

¹¹ Amy J.L Baker *Bonded to the Abuser: How Victims Make Sense of Childhood Abuse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2015), 92-95.

¹² Amy J.L Baker *Bonded to the Abuser: How Victims Make Sense of Childhood Abuse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2015), 93.

Encoding Trauma in the Mind

Trauma occurs during a negative emotion-producing event; it has meaning for the individual, the neurochemical landscape during the event is suitable, and the event is perceived as inescapable, encoding the event as traumatic in the mind¹³. This is why some people are traumatized by some things and why others are unaffected by certain events. All four must occur for it to be a traumatic memory. Just as not everything will be traumatic, various events do not affect everyone the same way. Understanding how trauma impacts the brain should make us patient when we understand this has impacted the way someone thinks. Trauma produces an emotional response even if it does not involve physical risk or is not life-threatening.¹⁴ There are also different degrees of trauma, from being bullied to abuse and violence.

When something has meaning, it comes from our need for attachment and our experiences.¹⁵ Attachment is why we form friendships, exhibit patriotism, choose particular communities, and become members of houses of worship.¹⁶ Attachments can also be made to inanimate objects because of memories, such as a home or a gift. Attachments are the epitome of meaning, whether physical, personal, or public¹⁷. If someone has been touched, there will be a memory formed, whether good or bad. Some

¹³ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 43-44.

¹⁴ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 43-44.

¹⁵ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 43.

¹⁶ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 43.

¹⁷ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 44.

memories are more intense than others. A previous experience may leave people triggered when they experience something similar and feel the emotion produced by the original event again. That means an otherwise harmless event or accident can trigger an individual to feel hurt or fear from a past event again. If a person has never taken the time to work through the trauma in a therapeutic session, they are walking around with an open and festering wound. Attachments can be healthy, but only if the attachments are to the right people and the right things. Healthy relationships will encourage and hold one accountable with that truth in love. When the attachment is to someone toxic, it usually comes from toxic treatment in childhood even when it gets recognized as love because it was what was known.

The mind's landscape for trauma includes five neurochemicals in the brain: glutamate, dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine, and cortisol¹⁸. Glutamate involves the storage and retrieval of parts of an event. Dopamine sharpens our instincts to be alert and react according to the situation. Serotonin regulates our input so we are not overwhelmed; low levels can increase aggressiveness and compulsory activity. Norepinephrine regulates mood and anxiety to activate the physiological response needed for a fight or flight response. Cortisol is released during stress and is necessary for encoding and healing. All of the chemicals must be balanced; too little or an excess release can be damaging to the brain. Each level of chemicals to be balanced is going to be different for everyone.¹⁹

Several factors are attributable to the vulnerability of the mind's landscape, such as our inherent sensitivity to stressors and psychological makeup, environmental

¹⁸ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 45.

¹⁹ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 46-47.

influences, recent experiences, and long-term memories of earlier trauma²⁰. Puberty can increase our vulnerability to trauma because of the change in hormones; the increased testosterone or estrogen in the brain can make us more susceptible to trauma. If someone has had trauma before, they can be more sensitive to new trauma from stressful events. In the most extreme cases, someone could develop post-traumatic stress disorder. If someone is overly empathetic, has low self-esteem, has trouble regulating emotional responses, has little education or has personality traits like obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, introversion, substance abuse, or stress due to poverty, they are more vulnerable to trauma²¹. Trauma is not always instantaneous. It can develop gradually from a series of traumatic events or abusive occurrences. If someone has endured harsh criticism or lack of support, anything that would model this painful memory could encode a traumatic memory in the brain, leading to similar responses to the initial event. Anyone who has received a negative response may lash out as a fighting response because they feel a need to defend themselves.

Inescapability is the final component of encoding a traumatic memory²². When one is unable to flee or has the perception of being trapped, one can become overwhelmed with fear. If one is overpowered by someone or backed into a corner, one can be afraid if one cannot run and hide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, almost everyone, with the exception of essential workers, was restricted to their homes. We were

²⁰ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 47

²¹ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 48

²² Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 48-49.

not allowed to be on the street or go to a park, the go to the mall for leisure, and so on.

We were only allowed to go to work and to get essential items from the store. During this time, tensions increased, and there was an increase in domestic violence²³. People could not escape from their homes, and many suffered extensively because of the rising tensions within the household. When one endures a form of capture, even momentarily, it increases the ability to encode a traumatic memory.

When all four of these instances (emotion-producing, meaning, mind's landscape, and inescapability) have been met, one will have the instance encoded to the mind as a traumatic memory. Reviewing the instances of abuse during the pandemic reveals people were not allowed to travel and were supposed to remain in their homes. Tensions were high; people were frustrated and stressed. Plans were canceled, and people were dying at an alarming rate. It was an extremely emotional time. With everything going on, the environment inside and outside of the home was filled with irritability. With the grief levels being so high, there was a loss of attachment; people could not gather in their houses of worship. The meaning they found in the community was lost, and there was little attachment.

Traumatic memories are thoughts and emotions associated with conscious activation or inadvertent reminders that lead to recalling the event and its emotional content.²⁴ One is aware of the origin of the memory, the emotion attached to it, and sometimes, when it happened. For someone who has experienced not being believed by a

²³ Brad Boserup, Mark McKenney, and Adel Elkbuli, "Alarming Trends in US Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *The American Journal of Emergency Medicine* 38, no. 12 (December 2020): 2753–55.

²⁴ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes and Cures* (London, U.K.: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 54.

parent, the hurt, distrust, despair, and hopelessness one feels may linger for years. When someone speaks up about being attacked, and is seen as dishonest, the fact that they were not believed could be more painful than the attack itself. The hopelessness that follows would involve feeling the need to protect oneself by all means, not having a safe place, and that sharing further events would be pointless. After a few times, one learns not to speak up, which causes one to suffer in silence.

Conversely, dissociated traumatic memories are unpredictable, can be intrusive, and will appear uninvited. Traumatic memories and cognitively dissociated traumatic memories are stored and retrieved differently from one another.²⁵ Some learn dissociation as a coping mechanism to deal with painful events. Intrusive memories can cause aches in the body and atypical thinking and behavior.²⁶ The emotional components are active when one experiences a traumatic event, especially in the first four years of life. People can recall how they felt, even if they cannot recall what happened. If a child were spanked as a toddler, they may not recall the spanking but can recall the pain affiliated with the spanking and the anger felt by the parent or guardian before the spanking. Anger in the future will probably be enough to trigger the fear of punishment again.

Aftermath of Trauma

Even though an abusive environment is harmful, and we need to escape, we may be afraid to leave because we love the one who is abusing us. Everyone needs a community to give them love and affirmation. How we see ourselves can be impacted by

²⁵ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes and Cures* (London, U.K.: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 55.

²⁶ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes and Cures* (London, U.K.: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 56.

how others see us. Many of us join clubs or groups based on a common interest. Being raised in a home with abuse may prevent us from coming forward because we are being cared for by our parents. We may not want to leave or for the abuser to be incarcerated because we may not be in a financial position to support ourselves. When people are young and have someone supporting them with clothing, shelter, food, and a place they belong, they know that if they leave the abuser, all the stability they are accustomed to must be left behind. In many circumstances, the person depends on the abuser for other needs.

Victims of abuse are often isolated or have a sense of isolation from the world. The friends and family they are accustomed to being surrounded by are no longer there to give words of encouragement and love. There is a divide between the individual and anyone else who may help them or hold them accountable.²⁷ Now, the person is left alone with the unhealthy treatment and the harm; worthlessness is instilled in the person. They feel alone in the world and that no one else would want them, especially if they have not yet completed their education. There is something fulfilling about a sense of belonging. Relationships are part of how people form their identities.²⁸ As youth are developing in their adolescence, they should be affirmed by the friends they have chosen. If the person has good friends or a healthy support system, the person will flourish as they grow. For a person to remain in an abusive relationship, the person who is controlling or abusive will separate the person from the family. Often, this breaking down of a person happens over time; gradually, the person is told or made to feel their value comes from the abuser.

²⁷ Lisa Fontes *Invisible Chains: Overcoming Coercive Control in your Intimate Relationships* (New York, NY: Guilford Publications, 2015), 108.

²⁸ Laura Moran, *Belonging and Becoming in a Multicultural World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 65.

They begin to feel like they are a burden or unwanted by others, even if they have friends or family. They have a distorted view of their relationships, and in some instances, they withdraw from their loved ones, and they distance themselves from everyone.

Some victims feel they deserve it or should be able to prevent it on their own, creating self-blame.²⁹ Some victims may need to be told or reminded that what happened to them was not their fault. Some circumstances are beyond their control, and they may require help to leave to preserve their life. When people believe they deserve it, they will accept the abuse thinking they were the ones to provoke the person who abused them. They may consider it discipline even if it is damaging. When someone has been conditioned to receive this treatment, they will need to deal with the aftermath of intimidation and manipulation to realize that the abuse is not justified by any means. One may need to come to terms with the fact that abuse is not something one can control.

Support

When someone has endured trauma, especially in the form of abuse, they need to be surrounded by support from friends as well as adults to care for them.³⁰ When someone has been abused, they are familiar with harsh treatment and may be hesitant to trust people because of the harm they have experienced. When someone is accustomed to abuse, it is familiar, and there could be a plethora of reasons why the person stays, including not having another place to live, the fear of being alone, and feeling unwanted.

²⁹ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, ed. *In Her Own Time: Women and Developmental Issues in Pastoral Care*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 67.

³⁰ Lisa Fontes, *Invisible Chains: Overcoming Coercive Control in your Intimate Relationships* (New York, NY: Guilford Publications, 2015), 105.

After having endured trauma, people may need reassurance and encouragement that everything will be fine. They may need to be connected to resources that will help them to survive, especially if they are a child depending on an adult or guardian to provide for their needs.

Safety

Everyone has a need to feel safe; however, if someone has experienced trauma, they need additional precautions to be taken to ensure their safety.³¹ When someone has had a moral injury or boundary injury, they could be injured worse if pressured to speak before they are ready. When offering care to that person, we should not probe for answers but instead offer a listening ear. When people are ready to talk, they will speak, and we may not be the person that they choose to speak to. The important thing is they are in the care of a counselor who can help them feel secure and can help while moving at the person's pace while in their care.

Trust and Transparency

Being trustworthy is important in helping victims of abuse³² because they will need to share their pain on the path to healing openly. When someone opens up, they need someone who will not make them feel ashamed for all they have endured. If the person disclosed, they were abused, especially years ago, they may not have gone into detail before. Many victims of abuse do not speak up because they are or may feel they

³¹ Eric Maisel, *Helping Survivors of Authoritarian Parents, Siblings, and Partners: A Guide for Professionals* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019) 169.

³² Eric Maisel, *Helping Survivors of Authoritarian Parents, Siblings, and Partners: A Guide for Professionals* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 168.

will be blamed for what happened. Feeling safe allows for the person who was abused to be transparent instead of hiding their feelings. Many are accustomed to hiding behind a façade because they do not want to talk about their pain, even if it is becoming overwhelming. People are not taught how to pick pain back up and address all the issues. When someone opens up, they need someone they trust to be on the listening end of their problems.

Peer Support

Others who have had a similar experience tend to be less judgmental of abuse victims. They can understand what was experienced from an empathetic standpoint. Often, one hears people label those in domestic violence situations stupid for returning to the abusive situation. Among others who are in the same situation as themselves, they can feel the support of a community coming together who understands what they are going through.³³ To experience harm at home and to experience judgment everywhere else makes it difficult to address the root of the problem because they need a space where they will not be judged, criticized, or mocked. They need to hear the stories of others who are going through the same and stories of those who overcame and were rescued from their situation to promote recovery and healing.³⁴

When everyone feels like there is no hierarchy and someone feels they are among equals, they are less likely to feel intimidated and will better feel they can speak. This reinforces the feeling that there is no judgment. When someone has experienced abuse,

³³ Eric Maisel, *Helping Survivors of Authoritarian Parents, Siblings, and Partners: A Guide for Professionals* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019) 168.

³⁴ Eric Maisel, *Helping Survivors of Authoritarian Parents, Siblings, and Partners: A Guide for Professionals* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019) 168.

they have already experienced intimidation, and they do not need to be in another toxic environment. We want them to recover their voice so they gain the confidence to speak up when they feel something is wrong or someone is crossing their boundaries.

Highlighting their strengths allows them to see their value as a base for recovery.³⁵ When someone has endured abuse, they are fragile and justifiably reticent. They are often taught to repress emotions of sadness and pain indirectly. They may have often been threatened with chastisement by the abuser. To maintain peace in the household or not to burden others, they lie and tell everyone everything is fine. Dominance can maintain this unhealthy dynamic as they reclaim their voice and rediscover their value.

Each person has a different amount of need for recognition, self-regard, a sense of belonging, and a tendency to submit to others.³⁶ Each person needs a friend, a community to embrace them on their healing journey, who learn how to support them best emotionally. As one discovers the origins of the issues, it can reveal unhidden patterns in the relationships that the person chooses. People need to see their value within and aside from their relationships. As they heal, there will be some things they remember and others that will arise from the subconscious that have been causing them anxiety or depression. They need a place to emote and talk about their issues.

Discipleship

Part of the Christian journey is discipleship, and we must care for those from various situations and socioeconomic backgrounds. When we care for youth who have

³⁵ Eric Maisel, *Helping Survivors of Authoritarian Parents, Siblings, and Partners: A Guide for Professionals* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019) 168.

³⁶ Harry Guntrip, *Personality Structure and Human Interaction: The Developing Synthesis of Psychodynamic Theory* (London, U.K.: Karnac Books, 1977), 358.

experienced trauma, we have to make sure we do not harm them. In discipleship, some assimilation will happen, but it should be the person's choice. Some people choose to assimilate because it is a key to survival.³⁷ Our responsibility is to teach the gospel; it is the gospel that saves and changes lives. Within a Christian context, the Bible is authoritative and the guide to help us with teaching about the triune God and precepts to live by.

Insights

Trauma can be instilled in a person from any event, but not all events will traumatize all people. Two people could have the same thing happen and experience completely different outcomes. When speaking to a social worker, I discovered that there are multiple reasons why people remain in abusive situations. When someone depends on the one abusing them, they not only love who the person is, they have a financial dependency on that person. Initially, there was kindness, but eventually, things changed, and manipulation became a stronghold for the individual. One seeks the approval of the one who has coercive control over them, and often, the person who was a victim seeking asylum returns to the one who caused them harm.

The abused have to learn their value apart from the person who is causing them harm. They need to know they are not a burden to their friends and family, and they truly need encouragement. They need to know they are wanted and loved by their friends and family. Some may need to be reconnected to others outside their households. Truth-

³⁷ Emily Prado, *Examining Assimilation* (New York, NY: Enslow Publishing, 2018), 41-42.

telling and healthy emoting need to be encouraged as they are part of the healing process. The love that one has for the abuser can be quite powerful, and as that love develops, that person has grown with the abuser, partially finding their value in the abuser. Even though the relationship is toxic, adolescents do not have as much experience with others, and feel this treatment is normal. They are unaware of why they react in a certain way because, at an early age, verbal and emotional abuse is not identified as such but as, in some cases, discipline.

Emotional and verbal abuse are often undetected because the abused are dismissed as being “too sensitive”. When a person is being neglected or abandoned and when someone is being threatened that they will be kicked out of the house by the time they turn eighteen, the child internalizes that as being unwanted or undesirable. They feel like the parent cannot wait to get rid of them, and dissociation may be the child’s way of coping with the rejection they feel. Emotional abuse is often disguised in snide remarks and withholding of affection. This abuse is just as damaging as physical abuse, and the trauma from that can cause things like eating disorders, dissociative identity disorder, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, self-harm, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Many have endured abuse and do not realize they have been abused. It remains undetected under the guise of jokes, discipline, or even gaslighting. If a person uses these forms of intimidation to maintain control over someone, they harm them. Because the person is often being abused by someone they love or someone they depend on, the abused will remain even if it is detrimental to their well-being. We cannot expect someone to come out of the abusive situation instantaneously because it is not that simple.

There are many factors to consider, and the abused may dwell on the good the person has done and may defend the person so others do not view the person solely as an abuser. They have to see the whole picture for themselves, and they have to be willing to leave and to embark on their healing journey.

Some people have used emotional and verbal abuse, thinking they are raising their children correctly because they are not using spanking as a method of punishment. They are unaware that it is emotional abuse and that the child is responding or reacting according to the abuse. They think they are helping the child, but they are instilling fear and rejection in the child during a time when the child needs to be encouraged and uplifted.

Abuse impacts the brain, and trauma from it is not necessarily immediate because for the abuse to become traumatic, it has to be encoded that way in the brain. Because abuse is an emotion-producing event and has meaning for the individual, the brain has to be alert, and it is often inescapable at the moment it happens. It is considered trauma. Trauma can happen from many different events. Even though a traumatic event has been encoded, that does not mean it cannot be treated and, in some cases, healed even if a person is emotionally compromised in the relationship.

A community of people is conducive to healing for someone who was a victim of abuse. The community can be the difference between a person's seeing the value in themselves as valuable and having the support that they can give it. Recovery is possible, but again, it starts from an individual's desire. When someone has been verbally or emotionally broken down, it takes a healthy village of people on their own healing journey to support others. Those who can truly empathize have a unique way of engaging

those who need support in healing from emotional harm. When someone has endured abuse and is on their healing journey, they understand how it feels to be hurt and broken. They will typically have compassion for the person who has been abused and understand the type of support needed to build up the people.

Shaping the Project

Understanding the psychology behind those who have been mishandled, particularly those who have experienced trauma and abuse, will help us to be more patient with those in our care. Some doctrines dictate that prideful sinner has a need to be broken and humbled before God, although most churches identify as a hospital for the sick who need healing. This paradigm shift will allow us to support the people who are truly hurting and need to know the unconditional love of Jesus. When one has been manipulated, one needs to learn how to see things as they truly are. If someone has experienced gaslighting, they have an altered perspective of reality, and that person who has abused them becomes the source of truth. The source of truth needs to be found in God, not other people.

The story of Mephibosheth demonstrates how trauma can have a lifelong impact. Mephibosheth lost his family and was taken from his home for his safety, so the same should happen for those who have endured abuse or are in abusive situations. They need to be removed from their homes for their protection and encouraged as they grieve the old relationship and, in some cases, their old home. In that transition from Lo Debar back to the palace, we have to be mindful that even though an abuse victim's body may be in

the palace, their mind has been in Lo Debar and may still be there. We should identify those people as they are being disciplined and encourage them to seek help. It is clear in the text that Mephibosheth recovered the home he should have gotten, but there is no indication in the text that David gave him psychological support. Since we as the church are limited with how much we can carry out our care for others, we can still speak to the Christian components in supporting their identity as fearfully and wonderfully made, adopted into the family of God, and as a people belonging to God. Discipleship in spirit and in truth is handled with love and partnership with counselors may aid in that healthy transformation.

As the Holy Spirit does transformational work within us, we must be supported by others in the body of Christ. Change is not easy, and healing can be a messy process; we need to be encouraged not to return to the place where God delivered us. When Mephibosheth returned to the palace, Ziba lied to Joshua, and they left Mephibosheth, and the things that were given to Mephibosheth were given to Ziba. Mephibosheth did not care that those things were taken away; he cared about David more than the things that David had given him. We hope this would be the mindset of the church that they would appreciate what God has done for them but care about and love God more than what we can give them or do for them.

People carrying the pain from the trauma or abuse will need to address that hurt for them to move forward. The pain from that process or the effect of being sinned against can alter your perspective. People who have been sinned against are guarded and defensive. Many avoid being hurt again from moral and boundary injuries. Understanding the emotional implications behind the lingering effect of those sinned

against allows us to look beyond the surface of someone who seems strong, aggressive, or angry. How we are triggered is related to our past experiences, particularly bad ones. As supporters of the emotionally injured, we must understand that moving past the incident may take more than forgiveness. God often works in the community, and leaders must learn how to care for hurting people.

Conclusion

Research has found a healthy community is needed to facilitate change in individuals. As the church, we are to participate in the transformative work of the Holy Spirit if we truly desire to grow. We must revisit our doctrinal beliefs as a church if we are to care for the people of God appropriately. They need guidance and they need healing. When someone is undergoing healing, it will be extremely difficult. It is a tumultuous journey when transforming from brokenness to healing, and one will need to be encouraged to remain on the journey. One also needs the right group of people who will build them up and not tear them down.

People have to be willing participants in their growth. Repressing emotions and hurt will not benefit a person in the long term. Many would prefer to forget about the trauma and move forward. However, without taking the time to examine the depth of the pain, eventually, it will manifest in an unhealthy way. If one does not recognize the need for help, one will not submit to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit and will remain the same or become worse. As a disciple of Christ, one is a new creation, and the

old has passed away, but through the process of sanctification, one must learn that change will not happen if one does not confront the unresolved trauma of one's past.

Every scenario one has experienced is not trauma. Some people could undergo the same experience at the same time, and it would be traumatic for one and not the other. It must be an emotion-producing event, have meaning for the individual, the neurochemical landscape during the event is suitable, and the event is perceived as inescapable, encoding the event as traumatic in the mind. Something etched in their minds will impact their worldview and how the person views or misconstrues a scenario. With this in mind, it is not as simple as forgiving and moving forward.

Every part of the journey of sanctification is a process. We must become a place of comfort, love, active listening, and support to people who are going through or have been through any form of abuse. With the trajectories of the mind changed, we must be patient as we relearn how to navigate life from a new perspective. Our support will encourage others on the journey to remain steadfast, especially when it gets difficult, as they hope to carry it through to completion.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Understanding that youth need a safe space is critical. It allows them to feel they are able to disclose when there is an issue, whether at home or in school. There should be people positioned to identify some of their struggles and look beyond behavioral problems as some may be demonstrating explosive reactions as a result of trauma. By learning the symptoms of youth who have experienced trauma, the church can be a support system while encouraging the youth to receive professional counsel.

All youth have experienced a type of trauma-inducing event, and some have experienced more than one. If youth are in a harmful environment, the group should be able to recognize the symptoms of abuse, we can report it to the proper authorities to investigate. If the trauma was something they have experienced, we can collaborate with the parents to help them find help. One such traumatic event was the COVID-19 pandemic. With so much loss, there were diverse types of grief that were experienced. So much loss and rapid change in a matter of days that lasted for a few years. During this time, there were areas that experienced a rise in domestic violence.¹

¹ Emma Graham-Harrison, Angela Giuffrida, Helena Smith and Liz Ford. "Lockdowns around the world bring rise in domestic violence" https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Implementing the project will include teaching participants the excerpts from the previous chapters. The hope is to learn the information and the symptoms will allow people to become more patient with and be more supportive of the youth. The other hope is that participants will be able to identify the symptoms in youth and be prepared with resources to help them. Being able to identify the youth who are experiencing abuse can also help us to direct them to the proper channels for help. Once we are able to help connect them with the appropriate resources, we can teach how to support those who are still hurting on their healing journey. We must also give realistic expectations that some may not heal but will learn to manage through the trauma. Part of learning about trauma includes the study of the psychology behind it.

One of the things that encodes trauma in the mind is that the situation is perceived as inescapable.² During the pandemic, that was a reality. If one lived in an unhealthy home, one had to remain there for an undetermined amount of time. People were confined to their homes with the obvious exception of essential workers and when someone was going to get food or supplies needed for their homes. If someone was in a dangerous situation, there really was no escape for them. If they lived with their abuser, there was nowhere to go. Many jobs that were worked in an office and even educational institutions became remote. People had less reasons to leave their houses. Work and school were done on their laptops.

Sharing the research from the previous chapters was beneficial in explaining the need for the project, and giving an overview of several trauma-inducing scenarios would

² Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 48-49.

be beneficial to the project. The support the church can give is the same in every scenario. The participants cannot counsel others but can support the youth as they are able to identify their wounds. The hope is that the soul care resources would be provided to the youth and/or parents so that they would engage in therapy and if needed, as determined by a psychiatrist, medicinal help. The church is also able to, upon request, offer prayer, especially if the person is of that same faith. The church is also able to offer love. When a person is going through abuse or addressing trauma, they may need people to encourage them in their efforts. Sometimes they need solace and refuge which is fundamental in the healing journey. We must be patient and understand there are some things that people do not always “get over” but they can learn how to manage through.

Methodology

I did eight weeks of sessions. The first session began with the Pre-Project Questionnaire. Each class included summaries and excerpts from the foundation papers. The idea was that others would become able to identify youth who have experienced trauma and are aware of their own behaviors. The participants would also be able to identify behaviors that may not have previously been identified as trauma-inducing. This project is a psycho-education project to teach information to others to triage youth who have or are currently experiencing traumatic events. The hope is that awareness would help us to become more sensitive to the needs of others who may have been raised to suppress their feelings and that we would become advocates of recommending professional help and better support to those who may need additional care while going through therapy.

Taking a pre-project and a post-project survey would allow the researcher to know what information the participants retained. The surveys will be issued before the initial session and after the final session. It would measure if the participants learned how to manage situations in an alternative manner and instances that were previously overlooked would now be indicated as a dangerous situation. It will also determine if their previous experiences or encounters have impacted the way they view different circumstances. The hope is that if there are questions that are left blank in the beginning, they would have an answer for by the end.

To receive the teaching, it would require an intimate setting without distractions. The study was held in person at a church once a week. Each lesson brought up was meant to teach a new facet of possible trauma-inducing occurrences. A small group would maintain the intimacy in the group and allow participants to be heard as well as to spark ideas and discussions with one another. A smaller setting would also allow the people involved to become comfortable enough with one another. People who are more introverted or reserved would be open to sharing their thoughts on each topic as well as any personal experiences to enrich the conversation. Personal testimonies may be added to how participants have managed or possibly overcome traumatic situations in their lives. How they may have gotten help, may add to the solutions that can be presented to others in the future. Having experienced things from their own lens can allow participants to hear the reactions of others when something helped or harmed them. The overarching idea of identifying youth in a post-pandemic was kept as an underlying part of the discussion.

People who were invited to be participants were people who work with children or youth. Some were invited because they were leaders in the church, whether elders, deacons, ministers, or lay leaders. The idea was that they would all become more aware that not all things are as it seems. When one takes a moment to evaluate explosive or reclusive behavior in youth, it may be the result of an unaddressed wound. It requires additional patience and learning to go at their pace not rushing the proper care. The church must learn although it may not empathize with all situations, it can be a presence for those who may just need a listening ear or a hug.

When teaching about trauma, one must be careful because others who hear about trauma can be recipients of secondhand trauma. When it comes to victims of abuse, especially physical or sexual in the case of a minor, it may be damaging or even extreme to the participants. Painting an image of the scenarios can cause emotional damage to the participants, and the images that it creates can be disturbing. To care for participants, instances may be given without detail to protect all parties present. If participants initiate conversation, discussion may ensue briefly but may stop if conversations become more of a counseling session. Researcher is not a licensed counselor and is not able to walk any participant through any counseling. Researcher has obtained a list of counseling services from one of her professional associates and will recommend the participants to seek counseling.

Each participant agreed to be recorded for data collection purposes only and was assured that the video would not be viewed by anyone but the researcher. The video was taken for review of reactions and comments. Group Discussion would reinforce what was learned, help hear the thoughts of others to reflect on the lessons and, if comfortable,

share their own experiences. Recording the lesson is great for reflecting on the tone of the group as well as facial expressions. One can reflect on the impact of the information being shared. Group discussion would allow the researcher immediate feedback to see how the participants were engaged with the topic being discussed. It would allow the participants to share their understanding of how it impacts youth. It may allow participants to share their own experiences and bring in insights from their own experiences that may add to what the researcher is teaching.

Any information that was shared that could have revealed that someone may be dealing with mental health challenges or their own trauma would require a referral. Prior to each session, the researcher informed all participants that she was not a licensed therapist and any information disclosed that you may harm yourself or anyone else may be disclosed. Participants were also informed that if any information were disclosed that they were going to harm themselves or others, information would be shared. This was important to note because the researcher wanted to give realistic expectations to the participants and let the participants know ahead of time that anything shared

Finally, journals were given with a journal prompting question each week for further reflection. It would allow the researcher insight into the individual's personal reflections. One wants to know how the information learned is impacting the person who is learning about the trauma. The hope is that there will be a conative change and that the participants will become more self-aware and be more compassionate to those who may have experienced trauma. Reflections on how the information impacted them would be helpful to have insight into the mental health of participants as well. We do not want to be the cause of secondhand trauma.

To measure what participants learned, a Pre-Project Questionnaire was given prior to their first lesson. The Pre-Project questionnaires were labeled with random codes I created to track the information collected by each participant. The same code was used in the journals. The same code was used on the Post-Project Questionnaire to ensure the information would be able to be compared.

Implementation

Each week was held at First Baptist Church of Hillside once a week every Tuesday at 6:30pm. We met in the prayer room and set up a table with chairs around it for ease of taking notes. Many of the participants used their journals to take notes during the sessions. Each week was led by a researcher, but one week, the researcher led in tandem with one of the professional associates. The professional associate volunteered to teach a session on grief. Initially, the plan was to have 6-8 participants, however, many who were invited to participate were not able to participate due to lack of availability. There were five participants in the project. Some were unable to come every week and the researcher received permission from the institution to do make-up sessions for the weeks that were missed. The make up sessions were held via Webex and all sessions including in person sessions were recorded. All participants made at least seven sessions.

Week one

The first week began with the Pre-Project Survey. We asked questions to see how much the participants knew prior to the 7 weeks of learning. With contacting participants individually, many who were invited were unable to make the time commitment. The

total participants ended up being five people, one of them made every session however due to work and sickness others have missed some sessions. The participants who missed most of the sessions made up sessions via Webex with the researcher. The researcher explained to the participants that according to the consent form, participants were under no obligation to do all sessions and if some sessions were missed, it was allowed. All five participants completed the pre and post project questionnaires.

The journals were distributed to participants and participants used the journals to take notes. The first lesson was about Mephibosheth. The discussion spoke about how all injuries and trauma are not intentional. Sometimes, one can do everything correctly to care for someone and have the best intentions, but in caring for them, an incident can happen that causes permanent damage. Participants realized that not all injuries are intentional and one disclosed the trouble with their child. The researcher discovered that parents will sometimes blame themselves for their child's behavior. The good news in the story of Mephibosheth reminds the people that although Mephibosheth was injured, he was still able to walk. He may have been disabled but he was still able to function. Even if one mishandled their child in some way, there is still hope for a child to recover or at least be able to learn to manage with the injury.

Week Two

The Great Influenza Epidemic of 1918 was the central lesson, and researchers taught what happened during that time. Participants decided to forgo the break and desired to go right into the discussion. We compared and contrasted the Great Influenza epidemic to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were more instances of what was the same than what

was different. The type of communication was different. There was no television or computers, just radios. The Influenza epidemic included people dying in the street. However, similarities were that everyone was quarantined and people wore masks. There was widespread uncertainty because the disease was unfamiliar to medical caregivers. They did not have any medication to combat it.

Week Three

Researcher touched on Theological Foundations paper, sharing that God cares about those who have experienced trauma and those who have been marginalized. Participants were encouraged to be an affirming community to love those who have been cast aside. Researcher explained practical theology. The learning topic was about Verbal and Emotional Abuse. Participants mentioned the example of Diddy and how he has become abusive. The statement “hurt people, hurt people” was quoted and the conclusion was made that we do not know the origin of his abusive ways.

Participants learned about Process theology³ and explained the Asian concept of han. Han was the word used to explain the pain experienced by the person who was sinned against⁴. Anyone who had experienced any type of abuse has han. Source “The Wounded Heart of God” by Andrew Sung Park was referenced and recommended by researcher for the participants who would like to learn more. Part of process theology is being able to identify the cause of han to know if the environment is safe for youth. In

³ Monica A. Coleman, [“Process Theology.”](#) ed. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2008), 709.

⁴ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993) twenty-four.

wanting to understand when jokes are still appropriate and not harmful, a participant gave an example of a joke that was made to someone that made them furious. In hindsight, the participant realized that what they found funny was hurtful to the person and that was an example of crossing the line for that person.

Transformational theology was defined to help participants learn the source of transformational, which is made through God⁵. As people are dealing with or have dealt with pain, there is a need for healing. If one does not commit to a deep introspection, one may believe all is well⁶. There is a need for transformation that can happen but is not guaranteed when a person gives their life to Christ and is in therapy. Chance for transformation greatly increases or at least one may learn to manage better with proper counsel.

Researcher explained the nuances of verbal and emotional abuse. Examples were given of relationship dynamics that can have unhealthy emotional entanglements that come from emotional abuse. A participant gave an example of how someone made them feel bad by blaming them for their spouse's situation. That person would use situations and other people to feel guilty. This form of manipulation is used as a method to control others.

Week Four

Sexual and Physical Abuse needs to be defined and identified. Not all forms of sexual abuse require physical contact, especially when referring to sexual harassment.

⁵ Oliver Davies, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2013), 69.

⁶ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 9.

Participants reviewed the signs of identifying someone who may be experiencing physical and sexual abuse. Most signs of physical abuse are overt even if covered by clothing: such as bruising, scars, etc. If these signs are recognized, the participants are encouraged to call the proper authorities to protect the safety of the child.

The impact of the emotional and verbal abuse continued briefly into this week's conversation. Participant recognized that verbal and emotional abuse can proceed or be included in physical and sexual abuse. The impacts of all forms of abuse are damaging. The only difference is that the scars of physical and emotional abuse are visible and easier to detect. Researcher defined and discussed signs of physical and sexual abuse, such as bruising, torn or bloody undergarments. Sometimes victims have poor concentration, withdrawal, sleep disturbance, may self-harm or have reluctance to be alone with a particular person.

Sexual harassment was also defined to clarify that not all forms of sexual abuse include a form of physical contact. Any form of non-consensual sexual encounter or exposure is considered sexual harassment. The participant disclosed a close encounter with rape. The participant was relieved it did not actually happen; however, the participant grieved for persons who have experienced rape. Another participant disclosed sexually suggestive remarks were made to them and it made them uncomfortable. Most participants had experienced some form of sexual harassment. Participants were informed that it was not gender specific. Sexual harassment happens to both men and women. Many victims do not come forward for varied reasons however one must become aware of any behavior that is abusive.

Week Five

The impact of traumatic experiences is not based on a singular occurrence. Exploring psychology helps us understand how trauma impacts the mind. It further explores the science behind trauma and what may have influence of what gets encoded in the mind as trauma. Not all events are considered traumatic and what may be traumatic for someone may not be traumatic for another in the exact same scenario. Everyone reacts differently to every occurrence and each situation is unique. What may have happened to someone previously may have caused trauma but the second instance may not be or vice versa. Exploring some types of abuse can assist with understanding some of the causes.

Types of trauma-producing events include spurning, terrorizing, isolating, neglecting, and abandoning. The researcher defined and reviewed neglect and abandonment. Neglect may occur physically, emotionally, medically or educationally⁷. These are all harmful emotionally and mentally, and without receiving proper care or nourishment, they can cause damage. Being chastised for expressing oneself or abandoned can cause someone to withdraw from fear however, when a person has not been given a safe space to emote, the person will have other reactions as a result. This learned behavior becomes a habit for the person, and one learns to automatically respond in a familiar fashion to a previous problem.

⁷ Alicia R. Pekarsky, "Overview of Child Neglect and Abuse" *Merck Manual Consumer Version*. November 2022. Accessed on October 7, 2024. https://www.merckmanuals.com/home/children-s-health-issues/child-neglect-and-abuse/overview-of-child-neglect-and-abuse?&network=x&matchtype=&keyword=&creative=&device=c&devicemodel=&placement=&position=&campaignid=18703109500&adgroupid=&loc_physical_ms=9003559&loc_interest_ms=&gad_source=5&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI4O6bkuj9iAMVOGZHAR06YgDKEAAYBCAAEgllS_D_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds

Participants learned how trauma was encoded in the mind: emotion-producing event had meaning for the individual, the neurochemical landscape must be suitable, and the event is perceived as inescapable⁸. When those conditions are met, that causes a person to have experienced trauma. In the most extreme cases, the person will experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. If all conditions are not met, it may be a difficult experience but it may not be traumatic. People could have experienced the same events and some may be traumatized and others may not be.

Week Six

The timeline was changed to do week seven because one of my professional associates, who requested to be present for the conversation on grief and was unable to come in week six. Week six consisted of conversation about Violence in Schools and school shootings. Researcher shared a snippet of her story as a middle schooler in the late 90s and feelings around the time of the Columbine school shootings⁹. Time was compared with today where adults are now the ones who have come back to schools and have injured and killed teachers as well as students. The same schools that the researcher attended now have an additional bullet proof glass wall and metal detectors in the entrance of the schools.

⁸ Ronald Ruben, *When the Past is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 43-44.

⁹ "Columbine Shooting" *History*. A&E Television Networks. November 9, 2009.
<https://www.history.com/topics/1990s/columbine-high-school-shootings>

Week Seven

Professional Associate Dr. La Verne Austin led the discussion on the grief and researcher contributed. As Dr. Austin was a licensed clinical social worker who had done her Doctor of Ministry project on grief, she was able to delve into the conversation further. Dr. Austin provided handouts to the participants and the researcher as additional information on grief. Participants had many questions about grief and discovered grief was a much more in-depth topic. Grief pertains to some form of loss which does include but is not limited to the death of a loved one but also can include loss of a relationship(friendship/divorce), a pet, a home, etc.¹⁰. Dr. Austin explained the losses that came with the pandemic and engaged the participants. Participants shared their own set of losses such as divorce, moving into new homes. Participants were asked about things that people grieve and added to the list: the loss of expectations, if someone was in the military or a close community, and the loss of camaraderie, loss of a job or career

Participants learned about what to and what not to say to someone who is grieving a loss ¹¹as well as why saying certain things is acceptable and others, such as “Don’t cry” or “Be strong,” are unhelpful and can be damaging comments¹². Often people feel the need to say something to others with the intention of being helpful; however, their help is

¹⁰ Cleveland Clinic. “What is Grief? Types Symptoms and How to Cope” February 22, 2023. Accessed on October 28, 2024. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/24787-grief>

¹¹ Bolton Hospice. What to Say and What Not to Say to Someone who is Grieving” December 7, 2020, Accessed October 29, 2024. <https://www.boltonhospice.org.uk/news/2020/12/what-to-say-and-what-not-to-say-to-someone-who-grieving>

¹² Williams, Litsa. “What Not to Say to Someone Who's Grieving” January 4, 2013. <https://mygriefandloss.org/what-not-to-say-to-someone-whos-grieving>

not always helpful. There are also assorted styles of grief where some prefer to be alone, some prefer to have company. Dr. Austin also reiterated the ministry of presence.

Dr. Austin taught how to recognize grief in children and the level of understanding in children will be different based on the age range ages 6-9 have a different grasp than children nine and up. Youth may deal with grief by asking new questions. Just like adults, every child is unique and each loss may be dealt with differently. One of the resources she provided us with is 10 Tips for helping your grieving child¹³. It is important to not hide your own grief and to explain grief is normal and encourage the child to express their emotions. Dr. Austin discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic caused grief among youth. The disruption of going to school and the loss of freedom to leave home was a part of grief as well.

Week Eight

Each week, participants were reminded that the researcher is not a licensed therapist. Participants were also encouraged when issues seemed to arise to seek counseling. Participants were provided with a list of therapists in the area recommended by Dr. Austin. If they discover there is a child who may be exhibiting signs or symptoms of abuse, they are encouraged to report it whether inside or outside of the church. They were reminded that although they were being educated to recognize the signs and symptoms, we are not the ones who would be able to be counselors for those on their healing journey. The goal is to support those who are going through counseling and encouraging them as they get help.

¹³ “10 Tips for Helping Your Grieving Child” South Deerfield, MA: Channing Bete Company, 2017.

Summary of Learning

Participants liked the discussion forum. They are now able to name some things they had experienced and with the safe space created they were willing to share some of their past trauma. They were engaged with each topic and in many cases wanted to know more. Some participants did additional research after speaking about each topic. The topics piqued their curiosity. Each participant felt comfortable sharing their own life experiences and sharing their own trauma. Participants would like to have the sessions to extend beyond the 8 weeks at a reduced frequency of meetings. They believed it should be ongoing and happen at least once a month. There were signs of surprise as the sessions gave language to some of their past experiences. The sessions gave them relief. Although the sessions were never intended to be therapy sessions and all participants were informed that was not the purpose of the sessions, they found it therapeutic to share some of the repressed memories.

Participants loved lesson one on Mephibosheth. They were engaged and learned many lessons in the aftermath of an incident. Participants were relieved to hear that if someone they cared for and advised was injured (emotionally, verbally or physically) as a result of their care especially unknowingly, that the motive behind their care was what God sees. Some demonstrated concerns for loved ones who went astray and some felt guilty as if the behavior of the loved one was their own fault. The good news in the text is that even though God allowed Mephibosheth to sustain a permanent injury, he was still able to walk. The idea of still being able to walk brought hope to participants who

understood that a person who was in their care is not a hopeless case, but it may just require adjustments.

Participants were so engaged with the biblical topic of Mephibosheth that they continued reading the story and wanted to continue the discussion on Mephibosheth. They were inspired to understand more about this character in the Bible. One participant reflected in their own brokenness; God loves them as they are. Scars, whether from someone else or self-inflicted, do not stop them from receiving God's peace and joy. Even though God may not take away the scar, God will give the attitude to overcome it. Although some scars will not be healed, we can always be active listeners.

Learning about the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 piqued their interest. As there were so many similarities to the COVID-19 Pandemic, participants could understand the emotional state of the people in 1918. The fact that H1N1 in the more recent epidemic was labeled the Swine Flu brought understanding to why when there was an outbreak there was a panic. After experiencing the pandemic, with the three waves that came with it. Participants reflected on their own time and state of emotion during the pandemic. There were many adjustments that needed to be made. Participants saw so many parallels, but not many differences. The researcher indicated the differences between the two pandemics, such as the technology available and there were people dying in the middle of the street because they had it and were unaware that they had Influenza.

One participant reflected on the effects of bullying and alienation recognizing some of the roots are insecurity and feeling unaccepted. Some who are being bullied are unable to work while others may become aggressive or seek revenge. One participant

disclosed being both the bully and being bullied. This shows that each circumstance is unique and the same incident happening to someone twice could yield different results. It reinforces the need to have a licensed professional to assess each situation. The church itself can be the spiritual support and speak from a Christian perspective; however, the church must know the limits that must be in place in order to operate ethically.

One participant disclosed they learned the effects of verbal and emotional abuse may be long-term and are equally serious as physical abuse. Reference was made to John 15:12 reminding us that we love people as God would want us to be loved. We should treat people the way we would want to be treated. One of the hopes in the outcome was achieved in helping others understand that there is more to abuse than what happens physically and the damage is just as severe. Fear mongering, manipulation, gaslighting and scare tactics do have grave effects on the victim and, especially after an extended period of time, can provoke reactions. In the short run, similar scenarios can trigger someone and others may not be able to explain the origin because it may be unaware. We are identifying it in youth because that is the context and many adults have issues that originated in their childhood.

Although the initial intent was a short lecture, the teaching was dialectical. Participants were engaged with a topic that brought about relevant questions. Dialogue was beneficial in maintaining engagement with participants rather than sitting in a complete lecture and hearing thoughts afterward. Curiosity of participants sparked deeper dialogue during the group discussion. Group discussions were elongated, and some dialogue was completed in a timely manner; however, participants were engaged in dialogue following the discussion. The intimacy of the size of the group was conducive to

sharing more personal details about their lives and experiences. With each week, the dialogue increased and questions were allowed throughout the sessions. There was a lot of agreement with information shared. Depending on the topics, there was some laughter as well as tears when they recalled some of the events in their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Some of the events that were shared at the time of occurrence were considered fearful and, in hindsight, were recalled with humor. One participant recalled name-calling someone in jest, but after the sessions, they realized what was said could have been damaging to the person.

Participants were interested in the well-being of the youth in their communities outside of the church. One participant inquired what if we see signs of youth experiencing some form of abuse who may be our neighbor. There was a growing concern about being able to be a support to the youth in the church and in the community. This not only sparked an interest in watching for signs of the youth within the church but the care was generalized to assisting in the well-being of other youth. The care piece was helpful because participants were informed of what they can do and where the delineation would be for us and a licensed professional.

Participants noted each instance or type of trauma that has been listed is not limited to children. Some of the signs that were shared and information disclosed were noticed in adults. This gave some insight into why therapists often revert back to things that happened in childhood. Trauma inducing incidents carry into adulthood when unaddressed. It also informs the way someone reacts. When someone sees a similar pattern of behavior in someone else or a similar event occurs, it can trigger them and the person may recall the trauma and react.

Participants were able to identify some of the behaviors in some of their relationships. One participant disclosed they experienced almost every type of abuse in their relationship. Many examples were given of the things they experienced and those signs helped put language to the issue. One characteristic that stood out for one participant was the verbal and emotional abuse trait manipulation. Gaslighting and using a guilt trip is a method of control. It may seem like it is a great method to get results, however; this is a form of emotional abuse often used by someone who is looking to get a desired task completed or evoke a particular behavior.

Participants showed a vested interest in learning about traumatic events. As we learned more each week, each participant was able to see that they had experienced some events in their past that were instances of abuse or that could have caused them trauma. They began to recall occurrences from their life and shared close encounters as well as their unpleasant experiences. Some are able to identify how their abuse caused them some trauma and how it impacted the ways they may have managed each situation in their adulthood.

One participant noticed signs that someone they knew was sexually abused and expressed concern for the well-being of the person close to them in their journal. The concern is about how that person is doing now. The lessons brought some recollection to different difficult situations they experienced. Information on the associate of the participant as far as age and details of the incident were not disclosed. Participants were informed that incidents happening to adults must be reported by adults however, incidents happening to a minor must be reported immediately. It cannot wait if they are displaying any signs of abuse, the authorities need to know.

Many of the lessons learned were recorded by the participants but not always was a reflection given in the journals. Most information was shared in the discussion rather than in the journal. Participants felt comfortable sharing their reflections as well as their own issues within the safe space of the group. Most participants did not have too much to share in the journal. As the journals were used to take notes, the participants did not elaborate much on the journal prompts. Most of what they had to say was sparked by the lesson or the discussion. It was great that participants had plenty to add to the conversation, however, they said all they had to say during our session, leaving nothing else to add when it was time to answer the journal prompts. Participants asked questions as lessons were not taught as lectures but in a dialectical format. Throughout each lesson, dialogue was encouraged in order to keep participants engaged.

The most effective method of data collection came from the discussions. Participants surprisingly shared their thoughts freely and allowed for the teaching to be more dialectical rather than lecture. The pre-project questionnaire and the post-project questionnaire were great for determining cognitive behavior but did not include questions to determine if there were any conative responses by participants. Although there were moments when there was a stroke of insight, it is difficult to determine whether or not there is a lasting impact on the participants. In hindsight, scaled questions would have been a great tool to give the participants as part of the surveys. It would have measured the importance of the participants preceding and succeeding in the sessions providing quantifiable data.

Some participants viewed the pre-project and post-project surveys as an exam. Although they were told that the project was not a test, some participants verbalized that

they were going to study. Although I assured them that they were not going to be graded and that there were not really any right or wrong answers, there was a desire to do well on the post-project survey. They were using the notes they took to study to help do better. Regardless of what they were told, they still felt like they were determined to have a better outcome.

Including diverse types of traumas was great as an overview. Having continual sessions to explore each type of trauma would be ideal to delve in more detail for each type. Doing an overview was intentional in order to avoid second-hand trauma and having the lessons transformed into counseling sessions. In order to remain ethical, the idea was to give insight and share resources that can be used to lead and how the church can work in tandem with licensed counselors to provide care for those who may be or are currently going through a grim time.

Bringing in a Licensed professional was extremely helpful. All participants have experienced some type of grief. All participants have lost a person who was close to them. Some participants shared they had experienced divorce and most felt anger as a result. Dr. Austin brought more insight into the difficulties surrounding grief and was able to assess some of the emotions that were shared among the group. Learned about the how a person dies NASH: Natural, Accidental, Suicide or Homicide can. A more recent loss can trigger the grief of other losses. Grief can also be unresolved. Having a memorial service is to bring closure. There is disenfranchised grief because of other circumstances. Dr. Austin also shared that we express grief based on what we see.

More invitations should have gone out earlier to others or maybe a survey to determine a better day. Many participants were busy during the week, and some

participants had to make up sessions because they had to work at night or had prior engagements. Everyone invited wanted to participate but the time commitment was too great. Perhaps if it was done on a different day or the commitment was not as lengthy, the desired amount of participants would have been met. Some who desired to participate were unable to commit due to multiple weeks. One person invited had just enrolled in school and once completing registration disclosed, they would not be able to participate on Tuesday nights.

Although it was believed initially that being in person would be better, doing the make-up sessions via Webex were almost as successful. During the in-person session, participants were encouraged to silence the phone to eliminate distractions. Participants doing the makeup sessions on their cellular devices were unable to avoid the distractions from the notification on their phones. A couple of times one of the participants needed to answer calls they would not have been distracted by as easily. Being that the rapport was established in person, and participants were in rooms alone, the intimacy of the setting was maintained.

Conclusion

People want to uncover the things that are afflicting them. They want to experience healing. Some were parents who needed to know that the errors that their children made were not their fault. The awareness provided some relief. Some were happy to learn how to help others. Each participant agreed that the forum provided helpful insight into their own experiences and would inform their temperament in dealing with youth and even other people. Being aware of these experiences has participants now

evaluating how they speak with others. Understanding that words can cause damage to others made participants reevaluate how they interact with others.

Learning about the diverse types of traumas helped participants understand that the behavioral patterns that they may have received from other adults may be a result of something that happened in their childhood. They reflect not only on their own behaviors and actions during their lives but also on their interactions with others. Some have realized that they must also be more careful with their words. Verbal and Emotional Abuse is often undetected because of not having physical evidence as a result, but it is just as damaging as physical abuse. Many people are unaware of what constitutes or the existence of verbal and emotional abuse. Learning the symptoms explained the behavior of some people with whom they interacted.

Participants are aware that the words they have used with others and their actions in jest were considered damaging to the person. As a child, jumping out and scaring someone is funny but some people can be terrified to walk around. Participants are now aware some of the things they said and found humor in were harmful and they now understand why things they said would make a person so angry. Laughing at the person's anger was not helpful but could have been adding insult to injury. Taunting or terrorizing someone with your words is not acceptable. Sometimes, it is not so much what one says to them but how one receives what was said to them. How the person being spoken to feels or receives what one says is the greatest indicator to determine if the conversation was appropriate. One does not want to bully others with our words.

Too much information can hinder the amount of information participants retain. If given too much information, the participants may remember more at the end. Participants

taking notes was extremely helpful for the participants to remember. It was not intended to be for notes but ended up being beneficial. It was the recommendation of one of my professional associates to focus on one type of trauma instead of doing multiple.

Focusing on less forms of trauma would have allowed participants to elaborate more on each topic. Going into less forms, even if I was to do fewer forms of trauma, would have allowed participants to come in with in-depth conversation based on having time to reflect on information they learned from the previous week.

All participants have learned something new each week. Expressions of interest, intrigue, and surprise from the information learned. Each participant learned new terminology, such as gaslighting, and was now able to identify the behavior. Participants recognize that not all forms of abuse happen in familial relationships but can happen from peers or other figures of authority. Participants seem to be more attentive to the actions and reactions of others around them. Journal reflections show that one was clearly concerned with someone from their past.

Exploring several types of trauma-inducing situations or circumstances caused participants to reflect on situations from their firsthand experiences as well as their encounters with others. Seeing the practicality of being able to identify the different scenarios caused a second guessing on an assessment or judgment on their encounter with others. Participants have taken the information and have been encouraged to use that information to encourage others who may be or may have experienced trauma. Considerations are brewing for following up to see if the information learned has benefited the participants based on what was retained.

Conative behavior was not really well measured. Study should have included more questions that will assist in determining how participants felt prior to and succeeding in the study. Rubric was not designed and once lessons began, it was too late to determine what measuring questions could be used to see a quantifiable difference in the project. Quantifiable data would have been an important thing to measure to see if participants have changed their perspective prior to and afterward to see how one reacts to abuse. It may have been a great idea to find something to assess the mental health state of the participants as well to see if one experienced some form of secondhand trauma.

Having one of my professional associates come in was beneficial. The participants benefitted from learning about grief from someone who did their dissertation work in that area. Dr. Austin is also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She was able to answer questions about what sources of counsel were recommended and she provided a list of counselors or counseling centers to participants and could be shared with the church. Her input allowed us to learn how grief in children will be different than it is in adults.

The project was successful because all the participants did learn something new. They may not have committed all the information to memory; however, they learned new signs to assess if a child may be dealing with some form of trauma, especially abuse. When a participant asked, hypothetically, if they notice the signs of abuse in a child outside of church, what should they do, I assume they took an interest in how they can help. They want to be an advocate for the safety of children.

APPENDIX A
PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY

Pre-Project and Post-Project Questionnaires

1. How do we know when we have crossed the line?
2. What areas of self-examination and growth need to take place in the leader in order to lead effectively and with integrity?
3. What tools need to be put in place for ongoing development?
4. How can the leaders help mentor the youth?
5. How can we create a safe space for those are struggling with being mishandled to speak up?
6. What materials can we make available to others who desire to be trained?
7. How can we develop teaching to minister to those in pain?

APPENDIX B
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Week One:

- Why is the story of Mephibosheth important?
- What do you do if someone has an injury that God chooses not to heal?
- What are some ways that we can restore youth who have been mishandled or ostracized?

Week Two:

- What are some of the parallels between the H1N1 Influenza Virus of 1919 and COVID 19?
- How does the aftermath of COVID-19 impact those who are alienated or isolated?
- Define the terms bullying and alienation.
- How does bullying and alienation impact those who have experienced it?
- How can you identify when someone is being bullied?

Week Three:

- Why is important that the church is a safe space for youth?
- How does trauma hinder transformation?
- What are some examples of verbal and emotional abuse?
- What are some of the signs someone has been emotionally or verbally abused?
- How can we support someone who has experienced verbal or emotional abuse?

Week Four:

- What are some of the signs that someone is being physically or sexually abused?
- What is the proper protocol to report someone who is being abused?
- What are the dangers of leaving these traumas unaddressed?

Week Five:

- What are the factors that encode a memory as traumatic?

- How can we support those who have experienced trauma?
- Define neglect and abandonment.
- What are some signs that someone is experiencing neglect or abandonment?
- What can we do to help someone who has been neglected or abandoned?

Week Six:

- What are some of the symptoms of grief?
- What are some of the things you should not say to someone who is grieving?
- How should you approach someone who is grieving?

Week Seven:

- What are some of the reasons for violence in the schools?
- What are some of the precautions schools have taken to reduce violence?
- How can the church support youth who may be afraid to attend school due to violence in other schools?

Week Eight:

- How can the church support youth who are experiencing or have experienced trauma?
- How often should one check in with someone who is working through healing?
- What is the protocol to report someone who is experiencing any form of abuse?

APPENDIX C
JOURNAL PROMPTS

Weekly Journal Prompts:

1. What did I learn from the story of Mephibosheth?
2. What were the similarities between the H1N1 pandemic and COVID-19? How does bullying and alienation impact someone who is being or has been bullied?
3. Why is it important to God that people are treated well? What was something new you learned about verbal and emotional abuse?
4. How can you identify someone is experiencing physical or sexual abuse? Why is it important to report that information?
5. What are some of the psychological impacts of trauma? What is the danger of ignoring someone who has been neglected or abandoned?
6. Have you experienced grief? What were some of the things that helped you work through it?
7. How can we support youth who may be afraid to attend school because of violence?

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